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THREE FRESHMEN

THREE FRESHMEN

RUTH, FRAN AND NATHALIE

BY JESSIE ANDERSON CHASE

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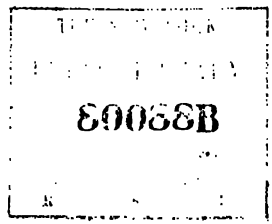

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THREE FRESHMEN

CHAPTER I

PREPARATIONS

The fragrant thoughts and the purest resolutions of your youth.—*Emerson.*

FROM the day that Ruth Chittenden lay in her cradle, the most interesting of Christmas presents to a large family of doting aunts and uncles, to say nothing of her own particular father and mother, down to the day of her eighteenth "anniversary," there had been at least twenty opinions as to what should be done with her at each momentous step of her girl life. But Aunt Bonnie Ray, with her proverbs and saws, had carried her points from first to last. It was Aunt Bonnie that embroidered on her baby blanket the lines—

He that lay in a manger
Will guard thee from danger,
Our dear little stranger!

It was Aunt Bonnie that made her first table bib, when she came to breakfast and sat in a high chair about a hundred years older than herself; and on this bib was the motto—

Toddlekins, eat, so your nose will grow!
Toddlekins, eat, for we love you so.

And later on it was Aunt Bonnie that brought a dozen quotations, maxims and mottoes to bear to prove that Ruth must go to college.

This aroused a tremendous war in the clan. Certain uncles and aunts saw in the scheme a sure way to turn "our modest Ruth" into that dreaded creature, a new woman. Uncle Jack said the child was better off in her own quiet, old-fashioned home, but Aunt Bonnie Ray replied that home-keeping youths have homely wits, and that he would be the last to want Ruth to grow up with anything homely about her. Aunt Sarah was sure

they wouldn't be particular enough in the matter of chaperones; but Aunt Bonnie fixed her with a stern gray eye, and remarked that the toddler must some day walk alone, and that—to speak literally —Ruth's very careful bringing-up would save her from any social indiscretion, even among girls who had not had the same advantages.

Father said there wasn't much money and times were hard, but Ruth and the little Elsie (now four years old) must have all the education they could take; and mother said that nowadays every young woman should be able to make her own way in the world, for marriage was so uncertain.

And so, despite the opposition and the jeers of one faction of the family, and amidst the great excitement of all concerned, amusing enough to the neighbors (who had begun to take a girl's college education as an old story), the great question was finally decided, and Aunt Bonnie had her way. Ruth was to be a

college girl, some day an A.B., if not an A.M. and Ph.D.!

Next came the important consultation as to which college would be fittest to receive this center of so many hopes. Every time that three or four of the Chittendens were gathered together, maps were brought out, and circulars of the women's colleges — none of them would have dreamed of a "co-ed!"—and localities, fees, courses, requirements for entrance, were freely discussed, together with any hearsay in possession of the clan.

"There was Mollie Greenwood; she went to Wellesley and worked herself to death; had to give it up in the sophomore year."

"Yes, but that's no sign. Mollie would have worked herself to death if she had stayed at home to water the flowers every morning and dust the piano."

"I don't like Vassar, because you see so many squibs in the paper about Vassar girls."

"*What* a reason, Martha! There are

squibs in the paper about Easter hats, but that won't prevent your wearing one next Sunday."

"Well, this thing has got to be decided *now*, or there won't be the ghost of a chance for a room next fall."

At last, as so often happens in elections, the college which had been least talked of won. In spite of its name, which all agreed was not distinguished; in spite of the fact that it was not near home like Wellesley, nor "far enough away" like Vassar, "for the child to get some ideas outside of Massachusetts," it was decided that Ruth should be entered at Smith College, Northampton. Immediately thereupon set in a tremendous series of preparations which made poor little Elsie go about the house with untimely outbreaks of tears and sobs, while Dr. Chittenden would ironically ask, "Is this a trousseau you're getting up?" as he picked his way among clothes in all stages of the making, and uncomplainingly paid the bills.

The bills were really very moderate, did he but know it,—so his sisters and his wife told him; for most of the things were "made over" from articles collected in the Chittenden attics. The family was richer in heirlooms than in the coin of the land.

Nobody "went away" that summer, but the whole connection stayed on in the lovely Boston suburb and got Ruth ready. A letter from the secretary of the rooming committee at Smith College informed her father that No. 34 Hubbard House was reserved for Miss Ruth Newcomb Chittenden and a Miss Frances Peyton Townsend of Chicago. (This was several years ago, when the freshmen were not obliged to engage their rooms while they were yet in long-clothes or else forego all hope of being on the "campus.")

Several of the family were a little bit shocked at "Chicago!" But Aunt Bonnie said that our frontier towns were not what they were ten years ago—at which period, so one of the uncles announced,

Chicago was mostly a marsh, reclaimed with difficulty from the lake, and just recovering from the fire.

Mid-September came at last, and threw its mellow light over the "old house" which sheltered the eldest branch of the Chittendens. Inside the chill of an early September frost had made itself felt since the sun went down behind the old oaks on the western slope, and the hickory fire in the library had brought everybody downstairs before dinner.

Father and mother and Cousin Will sat in a semi-circle before the fire, talking in half-sentences about nothing in particular. By the center-table was Ruth, buried in a deep leather armchair with Elsie in her lap. The child, but lately promoted to sitting up for dinner, was sadly sleepy, but bravely blinked the sandman away and clung to Ruth with both arms tight about her neck.

"I *don't wish* to have you be going away to college next week. You are *my —beautiful*—sister Ruth, and you shall

not go away!" The clear high voice struggled with a sleepy sob.

The little girl had a passionate fondness for her elder sister. She would always speak of her as "my beautiful sister Ruth." "She has mouse-colored eyes and gold-colored hair," she would go on, if you cared to listen, "and she has a *beautiful* nose—though Cousin Will says it's not big enough for a college girl's!"

"What do you suppose Great-aunt Priscilla and Great-great-grandmother Patience would say to this move of yours, Ruth?" said Will Chittenden, coming behind Ruth's chair.

Ruth looked at the paneled portraits, and then at herself in the high, narrow mirror between them, and smiled. Then she looked up and laughed, a quiet, meditative laugh, and said, "Oh, Will, I had a letter from my future room-mate this morning. Would you like to read it? It is there on the window-seat; read it aloud."

Will picked up the thick envelope. It

was blue, and sealed with a monogram in white wax. The writing was large and unformed, but very clear, with strong down-strokes.

He held the three sheets toward the lamp, and read in mock-tragic tone:

MY DEAR CHUM-ABOUT-TO-BE: The Hubbard House matron has written me that you are to be in No. 34 with me this winter; so you are marveling as to what I am like. *Cela va sans dire.* Don't deny it.

I know what a Boston girl thinks of a Chicagoan, but I truly have never *seen* an Indian, and I have spent every summer in Europe since I was three years old.

Moreover, I am *never* guilty of slang. When my feelings demand vent I use French. I can say anything I choose, as mother does not half understand it, and only remarks that "one *bonne* in the house is enough."

Now I will describe myself. I am aged sixteen, and I measure five feet eight. (I was about to add "in my stockings," but I know that would pain a Boston girl; I have not forgotten how I shocked an English damsel that way!)

I am usually taken for twenty. Mother says I have a sweeping way when I walk into a shop, as if I owned the town. I feel

obliged to put this in, as a bit of impartial criticism, though it may prejudice you against me.

As for my mental ability, I am always first in the classes here, but I don't care much for study. I want to go to an Eastern university because it is what the boys do, and it is so very jolly coming home at Christmas and Easter. As for the Iliad, and the dear Orations against Catiline, I like them well enough, though Greek and Latin are getting very old-fashioned; German and French and Italian are so much more useful. By the way, *à propos de* Cicero, my teacher—who is a Smith graduate—told me that I had the most remarkable English vocabulary for vituperation she had ever heard. I did enjoy overwhelming Catiline, and I spent nights looking up synonyms for rogue, villain, cutthroat, spendthrift and outcast.

"Feeling" and "will" come next to "intellect" in psychology, don't they? Well, I have no feelings, and a tremendous will. *Pense donc!* I am described. Like a Madame Lebrun, "self in mirror!"

I shall be in Northampton early, and shall expect to welcome you Wednesday evening.

Au voir!

FRANCES PEYTON TOWNSEND.

You are to call me "Fran."

Chicago, 15 September, 188—.

Will laid down the letter with a huge mock sigh. Dr. Chittenden laughed, and extended his other slippered foot to the blaze. Mrs. Chittenden said sweetly:

"You know, Will, you have always said Ruth was too staid; and this fresh, energetic girl will be just the one to wake her up."

Ruth smiled a bit doubtfully, and said, "Ought I to answer the letter, mother dearest?"

"No, child; there isn't time before Wednesday," put in Will, "any more than there's time for Elsie to have a nap before dinner—for there it is now!" and as the maid picked Elsie up, he forced Ruth into a waltz down the hall, saying, teasingly, "Come, chum, *you* need waking up!"

As for Ruth, when the last day at home was ended, she went to bed with many a hope and firm resolve. She would never, never miss one lesson, but would do all her work so faithfully and well that at the end of the course they

would put her on the faculty. How proud and glad the family would be to see her name on that mystic list in the "catalogue." Then, she would be so true and sweet and fine that, as her mother had said to her that day, she would be a worthy child of the men and women who for generations had been good and brave and noble-minded. Ruth thought she could never forget the beautiful look of her mother's face and the strong tone of her voice as she said, "Try always, daughter, to be *noble-minded.*"

She was going out alone away from the home in which she had been so loved and sheltered, and her father's words, too, at the evening family prayer, rang in her ears till she fell asleep: "May the God of our fathers guard and keep our child."

CHAPTER II

A GIRL FROM THE SUNNY SOUTH

Then that same day there passed into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.

—*Tennyson.*

IT was Wednesday evening, and Ruth Chittenden and Frances Townsend were studying each other and their new surroundings in No. 34.

Frances was deftly unpacking some tea-cups, and chattering like a magpie, entirely at her ease in a pleasant consciousness of being master of the situation. Ruth sat on the foot of the bed, already a trifle homesick, not knowing whether to be fascinated or repelled by her new room-mate. She liked the bright, frank laugh with which Frances looked up at

her every few minutes, with some funny turn of phrase or comical, impatient motion over a string that would neither untie nor break. She liked the fullness of health in every bend of the strong, supple figure. But she resented the fact that Frances was better dressed than she, and more at ease than she; and she had a sense of being patronized, which she could not have justified, but which made her very uncomfortable and so not altogether friendly.

Frances, seeing the unfriendliness, but not its cause, set it down to Boston stiffness, and determined to force Ruth out of it as soon as possible.

"My brother gave me this lounge and the tea-table," she remarked, arranging the china in cozy fashion. "He had them at Harvard a year, so they are used to academic halls. The lounge is a treasure. See! it has a cavern within, worthy of the Trojan horse;" and she pulled off the cushions and lifted the wooden lid. "In that we can keep our Sunday hats

and our tea-biscuit;" and she seized a feather duster and began to scatter the dust with no gentle strokes.

In the midst of this came a tap at the door, and in walked the "matron,"—"Mother Hubbard," the girls called her —with a slight, delicate-featured, sunny-haired girl, whom she introduced as Nathalie Page. "She is the other freshman I spoke of to you," she said, "and rooms right next to you, in that tiny single room to the right as you go out—do you see? And as you are the only three of the First Class in the Hubbard this year, I thought you would like to meet at once." With a pleasant smile and nod at all three, the gentle-faced mother was off to welcome other Hubbardites.

Frances held out her hand encouragingly to Nathalie, and said: "I'm glad you've come, Nathalie Page, for we, as the only freshies in the house, must stand by one another in the coming siege. You had much better sit down in the rocking-chair, *ma chère*, for such luxury is not

for long. Half the sixty girls in the house are sophs; did you know that, and what it portends? Well, they will be in here presently, by tens and twenties, and we shall have to give them the chairs and the beds and the window-sills and the radiators, and sit on the floor ourselves. So prepare yourselves for the invasion! It's the only hazing they allow at Smith—'rah for Smith!"

"Why, what do they come for?" said Nathalie slowly, looking frightened and ready to cry; while Ruth picked up a brush and began to smooth her thick, light hair, which was parted in the middle and hung in two braids nearly to her heels.

Frances laughed, and ran her fingers through her own straight brown bang till it stood out stiff with horror. "Oh, they simply ask questions—where we were born and brought up; at what school we were fitted; how many sisters and brothers we have, with ages of each; what course we expect to take; what

electives; which church we are to attend; whether we are musical; how we spell our names; and—oh, if there were time, I would put a placard on the doorpost, publishing our names, ages and political convictions, as they did in the French Revolution! But we haven't even our visiting cards unpacked. I asked about all these things from a girl I knew who was here two years ago. I find it is always well in Rome to know what the Romans do!"

Nathalie gave a helpless little sigh, and sank into the sofa-pillows which lay heaped on the floor. She did not know whether to laugh or cry. Ruth, who had a quick eye for color and form, leaned back against the wall and enjoyed the picture. The girl was like an old-time portrait of a Virginian beauty of the fair type. The red-gold of the hair, and the exquisitely cut profile with the nose just a bit "tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower," against the soft apple-green of a china-silk cushion, had a perfect

delicacy and grace; and Ruth longed to make a painting of her.

At the same time came a pang of injured vanity. If Frances had more style and self-possession than she, Nathalie was prettier. And Ruth was not used to being second; she was the idol of her home. It was the best lesson she was to learn in her college course—how to value herself justly and with good perspective, and thus become at the same time less vain and more self-reliant.

But the evening was beginning. Voices were heard in the hall, and while Frances picked up Nathalie, Ruth opened the door to a dozen laughing sophomores.

"Is it war or peace?" demanded Frances, hastily arming herself with a real Revolutionary sword which Ruth had received by will from her great-grandfather, "to be handed down to the eldest child, whether son or daughter," and which she could not bear to be parted from. She said she had "always had it in her room ever since she had had a

room," and Frances, laughingly, had just succeeded in hanging it on the wall in a perilous position over the head of Ruth's bed, with the label, "The Sword of Damocles." She now presented it with considerable grace, acquired by a winter of fencing lessons.

One of the sophomores picked up the flag which had been draped around the sword and waved it high in the air, crying, "A truce! a truce!" Whereupon both sides shook hands all around and introduced themselves to each other with very little formality.

There followed an equally informal examination of everything in the room. Nathalie was glad that her possessions were in her own little room, for she never could have got the breath to give a full account of them all, as Ruth and Frances seemed to be doing. Frances's stories were most of them made up on the spur of the moment, but Ruth quite gravely told the sophomores exactly what they asked—the names and ages of all the peo-

ple whose photographs filled her old-fashioned album, together with the exact degree of relationship to herself; the particular Boston shops where she had bought "that love of a hat" and those common-sense walking-boots; and the full history of the Revolutionary sword, inherited from *Rutherford* Chittenden, from whom she was named. The pompous and rather obtuse sophomore whom Frances had meanwhile been gulling woke up to that fact only when Frances, with increasing daring and invention, showed her a photograph of Rain-in-the-Face, sent her as a curiosity by a relative in North Dakota, and said it was her own "dear Pawpa."

Things had gone exactly as foretold. The "old girls," sitting on the beds and chairs, had eyed the new girls squatting on the floor in their midst, and had decided, according to their different standards, that Nathalie was the "gem of the collection," or that Ruth was *lovely*—"a real Boston girl!—just the type one likes

to have pointed out as a college student;" but Frances, or "Fran," as she was known from that first night, was the favorite. The girls that found Nathalie languid and Ruth stiff, flocked around Frances, laughed at her jokes, and took mental notes of how she wore her "society pins." She was a leader. Before the week was out, Fran Townsend was elected freshman class-president, and was much sought after as a "protégée" by the upper-class girls with a taste that way.

Let not the quieter young women complain of this. The gentle strength of fine breeding and scholarly tastes has its power, and within college walls more quickly and surely than outside. But the class-room is not all, even of college, and everywhere the elements of popularity are the same—a happy, unanalytical way of enjoying life, a quick ease at light-hearted talk, and a knack at making other people happy. Why should there be scorn of this, or envy?

Thoughts like these scampered reck-

lessly through Ruth's tired brain long after both the other girls were asleep. At last she sank into a confused dream, in which she felt herself arraigned before rows of girl judges, while little Elsie faced them and screamed, "She is *my*—BEAUTIFUL—sister Ruth!"

CHAPTER III

BOFFIN'S BOWER

Accordingly I use heart, head, and hand;
All day I build, scheme, study, and make friends.
—*Robert Browning.*

SATURDAY afternoon, after the morning recitations, Ruth wrote to her mother—a long letter, which was read in a solemn Chittenden conclave, and then handed about and re-read in private by each aunt. Here is part of it:

Tell Cousin Will that his darling dream is to be realized. I am "waking up" at an alarming speed. I am dizzy when I look back. I expected to have my books ready by next Monday morning for beginning regular work; instead of which, Frances found the list of text-books with lessons assigned for *Thursday* (the morning after we reached here) on the bulletin-board at the college postoffice, and we have in these three days recited two hundred lines of the Odyssey and five pages of Livy, taken two

lectures on rhetoric, and one from the president on "The Idea of a College;" and I have had two lectures and a lesson in drawing. You see we have lessons on Saturday.

Besides this we have been to chapel every morning, played tennis every afternoon, and Frances has forced me into a French club, to read Daudet, one evening a week.

I can't help feeling just a little bit homesick for you all. It's so very queer to be where nobody knows you *are* anybody, don't you know? There are all sorts of girls here, country and city, but most of them seem to be from towns you never heard of except in geography, such as Redbank, New Jersey, and Marshalltown, Iowa.

Frances is, of course, a little *Western* in her ways and ideas, though not nearly so—*different* as I expected! Of course, she has everything by the *quantity*, and that's what we've always heard about Chicago—trunks full and running over with clothes and decorations for the room—and a tea-table and china and a lounge and a pair of lace curtains.

She wears red silk stockings for every day, and a hat with about six big ostrich plumes——

It was raining, and too dark to write any more, though only five o'clock.

Ruth laid down her pen and sat musing and gazing out at the wet campus surrounded by the circle of houses and recitation buildings, with the waterproofed girls hurrying over the concrete walks, most of them going home from the library or laboratories to the Hubbard or Washburn or Dewey. When Frances and Nathalie came in they found her still sitting in the dark.

"Why, you blessed kitten! why didn't you have tea for us?" cried Fran, throwing off her mackintosh and striking a sputtering match. She lighted the gas-jets on either side of the bureau, and tweaking one of Ruth's braids, which hung temptingly over the back of her chair, went on cheerily: "Ruth, you get out those little wafers, and Nathalie can make the tea, while I fill the student lamp. I know there's not a drop of oil in the thing."

Ten minutes later, all three were as merry as the kettle itself, which bubbled cozily.

"I believe this is the dearest old room in the college," remarked Nathalie, in her slow, musical voice, with its upward inflections. "It's a perfect bower, do you know it?"

"I have it!" shouted Fran. "It is 'BOFFIN'S BOWER'! Don't you remember Mr. and Mrs. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend?—and Nathalie can be Our Mutual Friend, 'O. M. F.' *Pense donc!*" and she devoured a whole biscuit at once, by way of a period.

Nathalie did not know what they were talking about, but Ruth took up the idea with zest.

"Why, Nathalie, didn't you ever read Our Mutual Friend? It's just *fine!* There were Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, who lived in their bower. Mrs. Boffin was fashionable and had a carpet on her half of the floor—that's Fran, with her rug and lounge and china; while Mr. Boffin's tastes were severely simple, and his half was quite plain—I'm *Mr.* Boffin! and you, duckie, are John Rokesmith, Our

Mutual Friend! What a *clever* scheme, Mrs. Boffin!"

"I only wish I'd thought of it before," sighed Fran. "What fun it would have been that first night to have introduced ourselves to those inquisitive sophs as the Boffin family. By the by, girls, do you remember that big, black-eyed snob that I stuffed about the picture of Rain-in-the-Face? She tried to level me later with some remark about Chicago being yet a freshman in the college of America. I asked her if it was really the derivation of the word, *sophomore*—the Greek *sophos* and the English *more*—and if it meant that they would know more by and by. I met her a few minutes ago out here in the hall, and she looked at me freezingly, just about zero, Fahrenheit. I said: '*Won't* you come in and have some freshman tea from Chicago? It's warming, and you look so cold.' Then I fled for my life, and ran across this Nathalie-girl seeking her own small nest. Now, I move that O. M. F.'s room be used *only*

for digging and napping, and that on all ordinary occasions O. M. F. be found in the Bower!"

"Seconded," said Ruth, "and let these humble cakes supply the place of the Boffin veal pie;" whereupon she pressed some gingersnaps upon the Mutual Friend.

"You both are as good and sweet as you can be," Nathalie answered; "but, do you know, I had like to have died with homesickness this afternoon. I was just going to have a cry in my room when Fran dragged me in here."

"Do tell Ruth some of those fascinating things about Virginia you told me," suggested Fran brightly; "it's enough to make any girl homesick, to leave a place like that."

"I never would leave Virginia for a minute, if I had my way," said Nathalie, with the soft inflections which some way can hold as keen an emphasis as the less musical Yankee accentuations. "But

since papa died, my uncle, who lives in the North—in New York—says I have a regular darky dialect, and I must be educated in the North. So I went to Washington last year, to Aunt Page Beresford's, to fit for college. But Washington seems more like you were at home."

"Do tell Ruth about your plantation —isn't it the jolliest thing you ever *heard* of, Ruth? I mean to go down there some day. They have five hundred acres on the James River, and they have their own pier, and they signal the Richmond steamers with a handkerchief when they start on a trip; and they row across the river for their mail twice a week! It makes me feel as if I could write a poem! They have 'quarters' and cabins' and 'mammies,' and cotton-fields, and whole acres of jonquils which Nathalie can see from her window. Do you wonder she is homesick?"

"You will like New England, too, Nathalie," said Ruth, rather out of touch

with Fran's raptures. "Northampton is a beautiful place when the rains are over and the leaves turn."

"Yes, it is a very pretty place," answered Nathalie, vaguely, wondering why she did not like Ruth so well as usual. But Fran, understanding sectional prejudice better than either of the less traveled young women, cleared away the tea-things, and got down the heavy Liddell, and the little red-bound Odysseys, and insisted on their reading Monday's lesson.

So it was that Boffin's Bower came into being; and a cozy little corner of the world it was, too. For all three girls had the young woman's instinct for home-making; and their friendship grew into a very close bond, which held through many differences of temperament and training, and taught them the most vital truths of human society.

Ruth and Nathalie learned to acknowledge the beauty of some customs that were not of Massachusetts or Virginia. Frances, without losing her quickness

and vigor, softened and sweetened, and grew into a respect for Ruth's gentleness, and a reliance on her less impulsive judgment.

But this was the slower and less perceptible result of Boffin's Bower. The more immediate outcome of that Saturday afternoon was the planting of a real bower up there at the end of the long, monotonous corridor, which still lives in many lives, as a fresh bit of pleasant memory and an inspiration to work that would without it have been less well done.

Before the Greek lesson was fairly finished, there was a knock at the door, and in came Mother Hubbard. "I have come to see you about the dining-room seats," she said, brightly. "No, thank you, Miss Townsend; supper is about ready, and I mustn't spoil my appetite. I've just completed my arrangement of all four tables. Miss Marshall, the teacher in the House, has one table, of course, and I one; the other two I have

given to seniors. I hope the whole thing will be satisfactory for this term; we change you all about every term, you know!"

"Oh, Mother Hubbard," interrupted Nathalie, "please let me stay at your table!" And "*Can't* we three stick *together?*" asked Fran.

"Why, that would never do in the world!" was the cheery answer. "President Seelye and I have always agreed that one great point of the culture with which we want to send all our young women out into the world is the learning how to mingle with people, and how *not* to shut ourselves off in little cliques. A little circle like your trio is good, and all the girls need some center like it, but you must not narrow yourselves down to it; and meals are a good chance to throw girls of all the four classes together, for there they're on common ground!" Mother Hubbard got off her pet argument with more delight than the Boffins felt in it, as they awaited their fate under

its stern decree. But Nathalie, to her great relief, found herself still next to Mother Hubbard, on the lists, and Fran rather enjoyed being with some sophomores whom she "could get even with!" As for Ruth, she remembered her mother's watchword, "noble-minded," and scorned to fret over such a trifle as finding her place next a girl to whom she felt a decided aversion. Her mother would have felt glad and proud if she could have seen the real triumph of Ruth's inward determination, and the serenity of her manner toward the girl whom she never grew to *like*.

"Isn't Mother Hubbard *beautiful!*" said Nathalie, as the door closed after that lady's sweeping gown; "her white hair and her dark blue eyes are so lovely together; she looks so young, too, for white hairs!"

"Constitutional with some people," remarked Fran, concisely; and just then the supper gong sounded, and the Boffins joined the other arm-in-arm groups that

collected in the long corridors and filed down the broad stairs.

The dining-room was a happy sight; the close-drawn curtains shut out the rainy night, and the girls chattered and laughed with a freedom which Smith College girls are trained to deserve, by never letting it degenerate into noise and giggles. If the "freshies" waxed too silly, the upper-class girls would promptly come down on them with the dreaded comparison to "boarding-school misses," "who are supposed to be at the giggley age."

After supper the Boffins drifted into Miss Marshall's room; it was big and square, in the rear of the House on the first floor, and its generous windows looked off on the sloping lawn back of the Hubbard and Washburn, with the orchard at the foot of it extending to the limits of the "campus," and beyond that the stream which the girls had named the Styx, with its grassy bank, flower-covered in spring, on the college side—

"Paradise" that was—and on the other, the clayey margin dubbed "Purgatory."

Miss Marshall petted the girls in a gentle, funny, pussy-cat way, which made them love her and laugh at her. She patted Nathalie with one hand and Ruth with the other, and called them her two pet lambkins. Somehow Fran couldn't be called a lambkin!

"She's an old-fashioned little creature!" said the senior that had taken the Boffins in to introduce them to Miss Marshall; "but she's *great* as a botany teacher. She'll put your eyes out in the spring with her compound microscopes, calling you 'pet lambkins' to the end!"

CHAPTER IV

RECEIVED BY THE SOPHOMORES

That old enchanted Arabian grain, the Sesame, which opens doors,—doors, not of robbers', but of Kings' Treasuries. —*Ruskin.*

"YOU blessed old Ruth," exclaimed Fran, "we shall not be fairly in college till we have been received by the dear things to-night. And what do *you* propose to wear, Johnny Rokesmith?"

"Oh, Mrs. Boffin," answered Nathalie, "if crying were not a lost art in the Bower, I should lay me down right here and howl, for I haven't a *thing* I can wear! Here it is only a month since we came, and I feel like—I mean *as if*—I were squeezed half to death in that pale yellow gown."

Hereupon Fran, toning down her merry face and voice to an unearthly somberness, seized Nathalie, and forcing

her into the "short-side" step, which they had just learned in "gym," began to chant:

Stout — er
Than — I
U — used to — o *be!*
Still — more
Corp — u —
Lent — grow — ow *I!*
There — will —
Be — too
Much — of — me
In — the — *coming* — *by* — and *by!*

Nathalie laughed, and breaking away, sank breathless into a chair; but Fran studiously scanning her face, cried: "There is still a tear threatening the left side of your nose. You need some more light-hearted exercise. Don't you remember what the Prex said about the mental cheer to be gained from muscular exertion? Come!" And dragging up the reluctant Nathalie, she began again— this time the "long-side:"

One — two — three — four!
Gen-tle *Jane*-was-as *good*-as *gold!*
She always did as she was told.

She never spoke when her mouth was full;
Nor caught bluebottles, their legs to pull;
Nor spilt plum-jam on her best new frock;
Nor put white mice in the eight day clock;
Nor vivisected her last new doll;
Nor fostered a passion for alcohol;
And when she grew up, she was given in marriage
To a first-class earl, who kept his carriage.

By the time they had reached this climax in Jane's history, they had upset two chairs, nearly knocked over the tea-table, and sent Ruth into fits of laughter in a helpless heap on the lounge.

"There!" said Fran. "Now you are both of you in a more reasonable state of mind! We are now ready to proceed to the weightier matter of clothes. Nathalie, that yellow gown of yours *must* be received by the sophomores; it's far too fetching to be left out. I think there are still some ducats in the Boffin bank—yes! We will go without lump-sugar in our tea for a day or two, and get you some yellow chrysanthemums to fill out the gap in the belt—for if you *will* come to college you *must* breathe!"

"That is the most ingenious idea of yours!" said Ruth, admiringly. "Now, 'Odysseus, fertile in resources,' if you will only help me about the neck of this thing!"

"Why shouldn't the Ma of the family?" responded Fran in a matter-of-fact way, taking the needle from Ruth's fingers, and deftly gathering up tiny knots of blue ribbon to surround the slender throat.

"There!" she said; "now it's four o'clock, time for cooking." Fran had instituted a cooking-class, with herself for teacher, and for pupils about fourteen girls that had admired her chafing-dish teas. The Boffins now got out the dishes, the girls began to pour in, and Fran settled to work.

"We will have Hamburg cream today, and cocoa," she announced. "Hamburg cream, as its name does *not* imply, is made of eggs and lemon. It should be done in a regular double-boiler, but this arrangement answers."

Here she put some water on to heat, in the long-handled chafing pan. Then she deftly separated the whites and yolks of four eggs, and gave the two dishes to two of the nearest girls to "beat." (One was fortunate enough to have a Dover beater, the other had to put up with a fork.) When the yolks were light, she beat into them a large tin-cup of sugar, poured in the lemon-juice, which she had meantime set a fourth girl to squeezing out of three lemons, and put the mixture into a pan small enough to set inside the chafing-dish, double-boiler fashion. When this came to a boil, she seized the whites, which could now have "stood alone in mid-air," stirred them rapidly in, and then poured the whole into a flat pudding-dish and set it outside the window to cool.

A most unlucky place! for it calmly slid off the rather narrow, sloping sill, and a mixture of the broken glass and the "Hamburg cream" on the sidewalk below was all that remained to tell the

story. Except, of course, the knowledge of how it was made—with which acquirement the girls solaced themselves while they drank their cocoa, which, most fortunately, did not require *cooling!* Then they fell to discussing the reception of the evening.

"What are we supposed to *do* at it?" asked Nathalie, timidly.

"Oh, you walk over to the Gym with your sophomore escort," answered a junior, "if you're fortunate enough to have one; there are never quite enough to go 'round!"

"Nathalie has had three beaux vying with one another for her company," put in Fran.

"Then, before you enter the hall," persevered the junior, unsnubbed, "the committee decorate you with a freshman 'favor,'—classical, music, art, special, whatever you happen to be; they're all different. I saw the music-school favors to-day. They are the *daintiest*, tiny harps.

"Next, you are ushered in and presented to the president and vice-president of the sophomore class. Next, you promenade around, with soph after soph, varied now and then by a condescending junior or senior. You will probably walk between eight and ten miles before the evening is over. There's music to march by, and a square dance or two, but no men, except an occasional 'prof.' "

Nathalie was not a little alarmed at the prospect of "soph after soph," and so was Ruth, in a different way; they were neither of them used to "meeting people." But Fran thought "a good deal could be made of it, if there was nothing more than the game of shuffling off the bores, and managing to "promenade" with the entertaining girls.

The Boffins felt immensely proud of Fran, as they watched her that night, specially presented as "freshman president."

The scene had a pleasant background. The wide gymnasium hall, the three walls

with their chestweights and other apparatus, and the balcony and platform on the fourth side were covered with pine branches and pine cones set in great clusters—the class colors of the sophomores, brown and green.

Just behind the receiving party was a ladder of four rounds, set among the pine-branches, with the class motto above it in Greek letters, PHOSDE. On the second round of the ladder had been placed a figure in sophomore brown and green, leaning over to help another figure, in pure white, just stepping up to the first round.

"The neophyte, as the unsophisticated freshman, is most appropriately in white," said Miss Raymond, the freshman vice-president, as she and Fran joined the promenaders, after being decorated with tiny green bags tied up with brown ribbon and labeled "Salt!"

"Oh, it only means that we wear the college color till we choose our special class color," answered Fran, absently.

"For my part, I think class colors, like novel plots, are exhausted. But we must call a class meeting next week and talk it over."

"Just gaze at Ruth!" whispered Nathalie, passing on the arm of a silent, grim-looking sophomore in a stiff black silk and gold-rimmed spectacles. "Do you see her yonder in the corner, hobnobbing with the Greek professor?"

"I mean to find out what they are talking about," answered Fran, as the grim sophomore marched Nathalie down the line, while Fran slipped away from Miss Raymond, and caught Ruth just leaving her professor.

"What do you mean by monopolizing one-fifth of the men in the room? Can't you leave him to the ladies, Mr. Boffin? And why do you look so very solemn?" said Fran to Ruth.

"He was just speaking of the *Phosde*, 'Lightward,'" said Ruth, thoughtfully. "He made it all seem very real and earnest, the ladder and——"

"And when you get to the top you have reached the mantelpiece candles, not the sun," said Fran impatiently, with a backward glance at the ladder. "Really, I do think, Ruth, this is the *tamest* frolic *I* ever saw. It only shows what a lot of girls with a few of the oldest 'profs' —for the young ones stay away—can do. The next reception they have, I mean to have my Amherst cousin over. He is a freckled country boy — I have always called him the 'Spring Chicken,' and when you see him, you'll know exactly why. But he is livelier than four hundred and fifty girls. I don't know the twenty-seven I've met to-night from any other twenty-seven — isn't it a farce!"

"Fran, dear, you are in a very bad humor," said Ruth. "I think it is one of the most interesting entertainments I ever heard of, myself. The Sophomore Glee Club will sing now in a minute; they say they sing very well; and there is a mandolin club. Have you a program?"

Near the piano the buzz of talk stopped, and the quiet gradually spread to the back of the room, as the singing began, first to the negro chant of "Where, oh, where, are the Hebrew Children?"

Where, oh where, is our dear Prexie?
Where, oh where, is our dear Prexie?
Where, oh where, is our dear Prexie?
'Way over in the Promised Land!

His last words were, "Two walks a day, please!"
His last words were, "Two walks a day, please!"
His last words were, "Two walks a day, please!"
As he *went* to the Promised *Land!*

This song, with accompaniment of banjos, guitars and wild applause, went straight through the faculty with their pet "sayings," down to the college postman, whose

—last words were, "Two cents due, please!"
'*Way o*-ver in the Promised Land!

Two or three more of the college songs, and then the inevitable "Good-night, Ladies!" and the freshmen were "fairly in college" and the reception over.

CHAPTER V

MIDNIGHT AT THE BOWER

No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes suspicions, counsels, and whatever lieth upon the heart to oppress it.

—*Bacon, Of Friendship.*

WHEN Mrs. Boffin got home from the sophomore reception she found Ruth already in bed, with the gas turned low. Everybody knows that there is scarcely any state of affairs more conducive to crossness on both sides.

The irritation that Ruth felt at being kept awake she carefully covered with the remark, "You'd better turn up the light, dear; you can't undress in the dark." To which Frances replied, with responsive self-control, "Oh, yes, I can! Go to sleep; you must be tired."

A silence followed, broken in about

five minutes by a half-audible groan from Frances, as she felt about on the floor for a dropped scarf-pin. Ruth sighed effectively, then let out fifteen minutes' worth of irritation in querulousness of tone:

"I fail to see why you can't come home like other people and go to bed. But you must stop to speak to every girl in college!"

Then Fran turned out the light altogether, crossed the room and kneeled down by Ruth's bed, saying softly:

"I know, honey, I'm a horrid sort of person to room with, but you'll just have to endure me as well as you can. And I'll tell you a secret. What made me so frightfully cross at the reception to-night is just this—in two words: I'm *homesick!*"

"So am I," said Ruth, unexpectedly. "I've just begun."

"And as Nathalie's been homesick ever since she came," Fran finished, "I'm just going to crawl in and fetch her, and we'll have this out together."

Nathalie, frightened out of her wits, "sat up on end," as Fran expressed it, and whispered, "Oh, Frannie, what's happened? Is the house on fire?" But Mrs. Boffin, deigning only a severe "'*Sh*," dragged her into the Bower. Whereupon, throwing around their shivering forms anything that they could lay hands on in the dark, the three sat in a row on Ruth's narrow bed, with their hands clasped about their knees.

"You begin, Ruth," spoke Frances, imperatively.

"Oh, I keep wondering what they're doing at home," wailed Ruth.

"You can't be wondering that *now*," interrupted Mr. Boffin, in matter-of-fact, masculine fashion; "as it's about midnight, we all know what they are probably doing. So please wonder what they will be doing to-morrow. We'll take turns at that!"

"Well," began Ruth——

"My *dear* Mrs. Boffin," put in Fran, more sternly than before, "don't you re-

member how Miss Folsom warned us to avoid that habit which Mr. Henry James, Junior, attributes to all his American women?"

"Yes," said Our Mutual Friend, "beginning their sentences with 'Well!' "

"Oh, dear—never mind! *Very* well, then, will *that* do? At any rate," Ruth proceeded, taking no heed of Fran's murmur, "*an offensively commercial expression!*"—"to-morrow morning, little Elsie will run around and tell every one that *bwekfus* is *weady*——"

"Little darling," whispered Nathalie.

"And then they will all sit around the round table in the breakfast-room, and Cousin Will will give Elsie a piece of sour orange, which will send her into tears; and father will say, 'Don't tease the child, Will!' And Elsie will wipe her eyes with the end of her bib, and whisper, 'Never mind, dear Cousin Billy, I love you just the same!' Then mother will ask, 'How many lumps is it in cocoa, papa dear? I never *can* remember!' "

(The thing they had every day she *would* know!)

"Oh, doesn't that sound *dear!*" Nathalie put her arm about Ruth's neck and hugging her impetuously, said: "Now, if *I* were at home to-morrow I would get up early and bring in a big bowlful of out-door roses for the breakfast-room. Think of that, in this shivery place! *Oo-ooh!* And then I would fill about a dozen jars and bowls, and have roses on the breakfast table and in the library, and a jugful in the big hall. Then the servants would be bringing in the trays of hot bread and things over from the cook-house, and we would have pone for breakfast and chicken and beaten biscuit and honey; and while we ate, we could gaze off down the river and hear the banjos down in the quarters, and the little pickaninnies singing, 'Swing low, sweet *chayiot!*' "

"And if *I* were in *Chicago* to-morrow," said Fran—"oh, there's always so much going *on* there! I don't know where to

begin. There are always the girls to see——"

"There are *girls* to see *here!*"

"Oh, and what are the girls 'here' *doing?* Have they been anywhere! or seen anything! or have they so much as a box of bonbons to offer one? No."

"Let's go home," remarked Ruth, after a pause.

"Yes, of course, that's just where the joke comes in," sniffed Fran. Then, with a hearty laugh, she added, "Every Boffin of us would turn about and be homesick for the Bower."

"It really is quite time we were asleep," expostulated Mr. Boffin, as the college clock struck twelve. Nathalie, drowsily declining to spend the night on the Trojan Horse, thereupon slid softly back to her own room.

"Nathalie did look charming to-night at the reception, didn't she?" said Ruth, when Our Mutual Friend was gone.

"There's more grit in that soft-voiced morsel, though, than appears in her naïve

smile," Fran replied with decision. "Of course, she's a mere child, but she has a store of resolution. She has been used all her life—can't you see?—to having one darky bring her hot water in the morning, and another turn out her light for her at night; yet you know how plucky she is about her work here. *Pauvre petite!* She's homesick every evening; but instead of sitting down here to howl in our sympathetic midst, she marches over to the music building and works 'like a niggah,' as she would call it, with her voice. And it is very hard, up-hill work, that vocal practice. Professor Letowski takes her for a mere afternoon-tea singer; she doesn't look very serious, you will admit, and her training has been amateurish. But she is determined to make him change his mind about her. The other night I went over to Music Hall, and found the child singing away for dear life at the stupidest of exercises, some funny staccato 'intervals' with the French syllable *non*—and a tear rolling

down each side of that *blessed* little nose and balancing on the tilt of it."

Fran's picture, even in the dark, was so vividly droll, that Ruth laughed as unrestrainedly as Fran had laughed at the time—a bit too loud for the middle of the night; for it was followed by a soft tap at the door and the entrance of Mother Hubbard. "I just came in to say goodnight, children," she said, "and to say that you must go to sleep. I can't have my young cherubs coming down to breakfast yawning and heavy-eyed."

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry we disturbed vou," said Ruth softly.

"The reception was so *exciting*," finished Fran quizzically; but she kissed Mother Hubbard and squeezed her hand with a penitent squeeze, then crept obediently into her own little bed at the opposite side of the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW PROFESSOR

Your man of genius pays dear for his distinction. His head runs up into a spire.

—Emerson.

THE English literature professor had fallen ill and resigned his position. The Boffins, with three or four other freshmen, were discussing his successor, while they sat on the Hubbard piazza and rested from an hour of tennis.

"I like Professor Trumbull extremely," Ruth had confessed.

"She likes him extremely," repeated two of the girls in Gilbert and Sullivan fashion.

"You must admit that he's extremely rude," said Our Mutual Friend; "he seems to forget that we're young ladies."

"Well, he thinks we're so many minds sitting in rows before him, and that is

the way I prefer to be thought of by men professors," answered Ruth, with spirit.

"Minds are not expected, except by spiritualists, to open and shut windows." Fran spoke with wrathful warmth.

"The reason you don't like him, Mrs. Boffin, is just mortification, because that window he asked you to shut stuck so!" cried another of the girls.

"Oh, I can see Fran now, with that pole sawing the air, trying to get its hook into the window socket—and Professor Trumbull calmly proceeding with his lecture and nobody listening to him!"

"He would proceed with his lecture, if every girl of us were standing on her head, trying to shut his windows for him!" grumbled Fran.

"—Or manage his steam radiators."

"All I say," Ruth spoke again, more anxiously than before, "all I say is that he's a *fine* professor, and makes Shakespeare very interesting. I don't like the way he bangs doors, myself; but I didn't say I should care to *live* with him."

"Has he asked you?" inquired one of the girls in mock eagerness, kneeling before Ruth and taking both her hands.

"No," said another, "but he *did* ask very anxiously after her *head.* Oh, *girls*, you should have been there to hear him! No wonder *Ruth* thinks he's polite. We were all sitting in the college library—you know what an unearthly stillness seems to fall from the skies upon that place. Suddenly in stamped (yes, that is the only word) Professor Trumbull, and marched over to the Shakespeare shelves. Ruth was sitting there, reading diligently, which, of course, pleased the dear man. Out came his great, abrupt, masculine voice, causing every bent head in the room to lift itself. 'Miss—eh—eh—eh—*Chittenden*, how—eh—eh—is your *head?* Have you ever tried electricity for it?' "

Ruth blushed crimson, for she was easily teased, but she answered bravely: "Well, wasn't that civil of him? He remembered that I had been excused from recitation on account of headache."

"Civility itself," said Our Mutual Friend. "Now if you could only get him to open and shut his own windows!—like the other gentlemen of the faculty."

"As to that, I'll fix him," said Fran in a whispered conference with a girl named Mary Gooding.

Just then Professor Trumbull himself was seen walking toward the Hubbard.

"I dare you to ask him to play tennis with us," was the challenge sent into Nathalie's ear by a girl sitting by her on the steps. Nathalie, who with all her meekness could be daring enough, met him calmly and said in her deliberate, musical voice and with her irresistible, childlike smile: "Professor Trumbull, won't you join us in a set of tennis? We have been wishing for one more to make up our number."

"Most certainly, most certainly, Miss Page," he responded with alacrity, laying his stove-pipe hat on the railing, and unexpectedly whipping out a cap from his inside pocket.

"Oh, you are *so* good!" murmured Nathalie; "you and I will play Miss Townsend and Miss Gooding. They have been having things quite too much their own way. Shall we begin at once? It grows dark so early now."

By the time two sets had been played, with a "love" score on the side of Fran and Mary Gooding, the breasts of those two damsels were burning for the revenge of the morrow.

Meantime they sat down innocently with the others to rest, and made themselves almost suspiciously agreeable to the professor. He was an Englishman and had been studying in Germany since his graduation from Cambridge. The tennis had been for him a "roaring gently like a sucking dove;" he was a champion tennis-player, but knew nothing of playing with women. Fran was a good player, but she could not handle his peculiar "serves." He felt awkward, now that it was over, but was much comforted by Nathalie's huge delight in

their score and by Fran's artless forgiveness.

The girls found him even more unaware than they had expected of the amenities of social life, or even of the everyday knowledge of everyday things —so much so that to make fun of him began to seem brutal instead of being witty.

"What is the name of that pretty purple flower yonder?" he asked rather shyly of Nathalie, who was truly trying by this time to put him at his ease.

"That is *heliotrope*," she said, trying not to look surprised.

"Ah, yes, I remember now to have seen the name—*helios* and *trepein*, 'to turn toward the sun,' alluding to the actual habit of the plant, I presume. And those?" he asked again, pointing to some velvety purple pansies, in a window-box, just arranged for Mother Hubbard's front window.

"Those," interrupted Fran with her most confiding expression, "are called

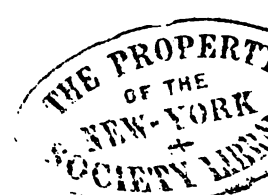
cogitators, because they stand for *thought*, you know."

"I never heard the name, though I have noticed the plant before," said the professor, rising to go. "And thank you, Miss Page, for a very pleasant afternoon."

All the girls frowned upon Fran when he was gone. "That was as silly as it was shabby," said Ruth angrily. But Fran, afraid of losing courage for the next morning, hardened her heart.

At eleven in the morning the freshmen that elected English literature—a class of perhaps thirty—followed Professor Trumbull into recitation room No. 4. They took their seats, and then began to shiver and to look suspiciously about at the windows. There were two wide open on the windy side of the room. Before any one could reach them, however, Fran's voice rang clearly out, "Professor Trumbull, will you kindly close the windows?"

"Why—eh—eh—most certainly, most certainly," said the absent-minded gentle-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man, advancing toward the nearest one, his lecture manuscript in one hand, his watch in the other. Not seeing the pole, or understanding its management, he cut matters short by jumping on the sill and poking the top of the upper sash with a convenient umbrella, dropping his manuscript and taking several minutes to put it in order again. Some of the girls giggled, but Ruth looked at Fran reproachfully, only to be met with a look of innocent good-humor.

The *next* day the room felt strangely warm as the class entered. Every window was closed, and the heat turned on at full blast.

"Professor Trumbull, will you please turn off the steam?" asked Miss Gooding, promptly.

"I—eh—eh—I beg your pardon," said he, with a pitiful red face; "I—really—don't know—*how!*"

Ruth rose instantly and walked toward one of the radiators with such a heroic air that Fran, moved to one of her

quick penitences, went and attended to the other.

How much of all this the professor "saw through" was never known; but the girls accused Ruth of giving him a private course in radiator valves. Certain it is, that thereafter he saw to the temperature of the class-room unassisted.

When the Boffins got back to the Bower Ruth was all ready to protest against the mortification of Professor Trumbull. But to her amazement and to Nathalie's unfeigned dismay, Fran threw herself on the Trojan Horse and wept.

"Oh, don't say what you think of me, Boffins. I know I've simply disgraced the family. And just as I'm going to leave it! Oh, dear, what can I ever, ever do!"

"What *is* the matter?" gasped Our Mutual Friend, looking at Ruth.

"Oh," continued Mrs. Boffin, "I heard from mamma this morning—poor darling mamsie! And papa's lost his last penny. And they're selling the house and mov-

ing into a little, cheap, dark flat—on Wabash Avenue, most likely, between a livery-stable and a beer saloon! And I've got to leave college, of course, and —*sew* for a living, I suppose, while poor papa builds up his business again! Every one says it's not his fault, but the precious darling will just go *crazy*. Mamma won't, though. She has the pluck of David and Goliath put together, in an emergency. She says I must stay through this term. It's cheaper, as the 'board and tuition' is paid! And by Christmas time they'll be settled, so I can be of some use. The two boys can go to the public school, and mamma and I peg along without a servant!"

All this came out in a torrent, before the others could really get hold of the force of the news. Fran said imperatively as she wiped her nose, "Now, you two stay in here and do whatever you were going to do, and I'll go into Nathalie's room and get myself together

for dinner. Don't let's tell the girls just yet."

So Fran went into No. 32 and thought and thought, and wrote an impulsive letter, full of affection and courage, to her mother; while Ruth and Nathalie in the Bower hardly spoke to each other—Nathalie crying a little over some sewing, and Ruth wondering what her mother would think was the "noble" way to comfort Fran, if any comforting were possible just yet.

CHAPTER VII

MOUNTAIN DAY

For beauty, truth and goodness are not obsolete; they are as indigenous in Massachusetts as in Tuscany or the Isles of Greece.

—*Emerson, "Art."*

AFTER that first dreadful day when the bad news entered into the souls of the Boffins, the shock of it grew duller day by day. Christmas was so far off, and something might "happen;" such is always youth's hopeful reasoning.

By the end of the week, which had gone so slowly, Fran's spirits were almost as bright as ever, except for a pang now and then over the trouble at home. Ruth seemed to feel it all the most of the three; she was more experienced in the trials of poverty, of which Fran knew almost nothing; and she was more used to plan-

ning for the future, and so saw what a pity it was for Fran to lose the chance of self-support which the college course could give her.

However, she said nothing of these anxieties, and the Boffin talk was soon turned to the coming Mountain Day.

Our older New England universities set a worthy example before the younger generation of colleges in sending out their students for one whole day in golden October to live among the everlasting hills.

On other days their young men and women may geologize over rock-strata, and botanize among flower-petals. But for this once they must lay aside hammer and glass and dissecting-needle to breathe into their lungs the clear air of the hill-tops and into their hearts the beauty of autumn sky and frost-painted foliage.

And so Ruth found herself keeping Mountain Day at Smith College, as her father had kept it thirty years before at Williams.

Great plans were on foot; and parties —big and jolly, or select and intimate— were packing luncheons and folding shawls and donning gloves and hats, while horses of all sorts and conditions from all the neighboring livery-stables were pulling up before the houses vehicles of the oddest shapes and sizes.

The Boffin party was unique. Ruth, naturally a philanthropist, and trained to city missionary work at home, had taken charge of a class of young women in one of the town Sunday-schools. Most of this class were mill hands. Alternately laughed at and sympathized with by Fran and Nathalie, she had begged of the mill manager that she might have the ten girls for this one day.

When she had gained her point, and her invitation had been most eagerly accepted by all ten, she had, about a week beforehand, consulted with the other Boffins about ways and means. Fran had always been the only one to have any money beyond a "stamp-supply," and

she was now suddenly limited to an equally close margin. The problem of the mill-girl treat began to look pretty serious.

"We shall need a big buckboard and four horses if we take them to Mount Tom or to Sugarloaf," said Ruth, dolefully.

"There is only one way to manage it!" said Fran, with all business-like severity. "We must earn the money. And it can be done—easily enough. There!" and fishing out of the waste-basket a huge piece of brown wrapping paper, she smoothed the creases and printed on it, in clear, large letters:

NOTICE.

THE UNDERSIGNED

Are prepared to serve the public in the following particulars, for one week, beginning October the fifteenth:

Tennis-courts marked out, with superb quality of whitewash, warranted right angles at the corners, per court,	$0.75
Beds made, each,	.10
Shoe-buttons sewed on, each,	.05

Stocking holes darned, per square inch, $0.15
Walnut or date-creams, home-made, per lb., .60
Hot waffles, each, - - - - .10
Notes on lectures copied with gold pen, per page, - - - - - - .10
Notes on lectures copied with "stylo," per page .05

THE BOFFINS.

Voilà! If we don't make fifteen dollars out of that, I'm an Irishman!"

The notice had been pinned up at the end of the corridor, and within a few days seventeen dollars and eighty-five cents in silver and copper jingled merrily in the Boffins' bank.

The result was now seen in the shape of a long wagon with two seats along the sides—known thereabouts as a "barge" —filled with Ruth's mill girls, while the Boffins and Mother Hubbard, whom they had captured for the scheme, were ingeniously sprinkled about as entertaining committee.

Ruth, pleased with her plan's success, threw herself conscientiously into the work of talking to the two girls beside her. Fran, entering into the affair with

the more human notion of the fun to be had out of the occasion, managed to distribute her enjoyment as far as her voice and laugh could reach. And Nathalie sat next to Mother Hubbard, smiling at Fran's jokes, and trying to be unconscious of the very admiring stare of the girl opposite, who had an eye for delicate beauty and no shyness in enjoying it.

Through the country they drove for four hours of a perfect October forenoon. Now and then a long farmhouse stretched beside the road its length of kitchen and wood-house and barns, and was flanked by fields of yellow pumpkins gathered into piles or lying in rows at the foot of deserted bean-poles.

Ahead, Mount Holyoke and her "sister peak, Mount Tom" (so called by an Amherst freshman in one of his compositions) lifted their heads and looked across at each other, like old friends wondering how the rift had come between them.

Very hungry the girls were when, at noon, they drew up in front of a big inn

at the foot of Sugarloaf, where they had planned to add hot coffee to their luncheon.

Refreshed by biscuit and chicken, they started afoot up the hill, along a road too steep and woody for the horses, and were rewarded by a view, somewhat shut in, but mellowed and harmonized by the warm haze almost like that of an Indian summer.

Back again at the inn, seated around on the floor before a log fire, they suggested that some one should tell a story during the time they had to spare before starting for home. Fran urged Ruth to lead off, but Mother Hubbard said: "We have just about time for one short story, and I move that we draw lots for the teller." The lot, decided by drawing slips of paper from Fran's sailor hat, fell to Nathalie. So, after much urging by Pa and Ma, she began:

"We have an old negress on our plantation at home, my old mammy, who is very fond of hearing her 'young miss'

sing. There was one song she just loved to hear. Fran, if you'll get my guitar, I'll sing it for them."

Surprised at the shy Nathalie's forwardness, Fran encouraged it with a bright smile and a pat on the shoulder, as she handed her the guitar and whispered: "That's fine, John Rokesmith!"

Nathalie took it, and sang—less and less consciously as she went on:

> Ask nothing more of me, Sweet!
> All I can give you, I give!
> Heart of my heart, were it more,
> More should be laid at your feet!
> Love that should help you to live!
> Song that should spur you to soar!
> Ask nothing more of me, Sweet—
> Ask nothing more, nothing more!

Everybody was quiet as Nathalie ended —very simply, with a pathetic little twang in the last line, as if tired out with the fervor of the words and music. Then she laughed, a little nervously, and went on:

"You see, old mammy had stopped her dusting so often to hear me sing that

she pretty nearly knew it by heart. And one day mamma and I were walking up the terraces from the river, about four o'clock in the evening, and we heard mammy's voice a-quaverin' away, and we stopped and listened. And there was old Jake, the gardener, a-sitting on the kitchen step, looking up at mammy in the most love-sick way—and she a-singing:"

(Here Nathalie again took up the guitar.)

Ask nuffin moh ob me, Honey!
All I can gib, I gib yoh,
Haht ob my haht, was it *moah*,
Moh should be laid at yoh feet!
Lub dat should help yoh to lib,
Song dat should make yoh *soah*, Honey!
Ask nuffin moh ob me, Honey!
Don' yoh be askin' no moah!

Nathalie positively refused a very persistent encore to the dramatic little tale, and took modestly, but with a blush of pleasure, the applause accorded to the story and its guitar accompaniment.

The drive home was even gayer than in the morning, as the guests had lost

their shyness. But toward the end the mill girls' thoughts, lingering over the day's pleasure, began to sober to the remembered work of the morrow, with its endless clattering of heartless iron spindles, while Ruth could not keep her head from puzzling over certain mysteries of wealth and poverty and social "classes."

CHAPTER VIII

THE THANKSGIVING VACATION

He comes,—he comes—the Frost Spirit comes!
You may trace his footsteps now
On the naked woods and the blasted fields and the
brown hill's withered brow.
He has smitten the leaves of the gray old trees
where their pleasant green came forth,
And the winds, which follow wherever he goes,
have shaken them down to earth.

—*Whittier.*

NOVEMBER, settling into routine, passed very quickly, and Thanksgiving Day came on wings, bringing the first recess from work.

Cousin Will was on hand Tuesday night, ready to take Ruth home as soon as recitations were over Wednesday noon. The other two Boffins were to stay at the Bower for the three days' vacation and comfort themselves with a "spread" from the contents of a large box sent to Fran by her "girl chum" in Chicago.

Tuesday evening was divided between the bowling-alley and Music Hall, where Ruth took Will to a 'cello recital from nine to ten. Upon his teasingly remarking that he couldn't see anything but fun in a girls' college, Ruth said he must go into at least one recitation and see some work. Accordingly, ten o'clock of Wednesday morning found all three Boffins escorting Mr. Chittenden into "Freshman Rhetoric," which he had chosen in preference to Greek or Conic Sections.

After calling the roll very rapidly, so that the responsive "Presents!" tumbled over one another, and only a most nimble brain could have fastened them to the right names, Miss Folsom opened the recitation by saying:

"Our lesson to-day is to begin with a certain trick that we found in some poets, of leaving an incomplete verse in the middle of a stanza, for a definite rhetorical effect."

A voice from the second row: "Miss Folsom, is it fair to call it a *trick?*"

Miss Folsom, directing her keen glance toward a tall, sprightly-looking girl, with a straight, uncompromising red bang, asks in turn: "What is your objection to the word, Miss Brown?"

"I think the word *trick* suggests something unworthy. The device we are talking about need not be unworthy; it may be a perfectly allowable bit of rhetoric."

"A very fair point," answers Miss Folsom, with the impersonal candor which makes her class-room a delight. "The word *trick*, connected with the Old French *tricher*, does seem to imply dishonesty of purpose; though there is the innocent meaning of it in the expression, 'a *trick* of speech, or countenance.' Shall we say, then, *design*, *expedient*, *artifice?*"

"It *is* artifice, surely."

"And what illustration of it did you find, Miss Brown?"

"A sonnet by Keats. The latter part of it reads:

> And other spirits there are standing apart
> Upon the forehead of the age to come;
> These, these will give the world another heart,
> And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
> Of mighty workings?—
> Listen a while, ye nations, and be dumb.

The stop after 'workings' seems a very strong use of a pause in the measure to suggest a real pause in the action—to 'listen a while, and be dumb.' The halt in the verse certainly calls a halt in the reader's thought."

"An excellent example; have you another, Miss Carey!"

"I brought in an extract from Browning—The Pied Piper of Hamelin:

> Rats.
> They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
> And bit the babies in the cradles,
> And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
> And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles.

Here the gap in the meter throws a whole verse-worth of emphasis on the word *Rats*. The mind unconsciously dwells

on that one syllable long enough to fill out the meter."

"Yes, that is good. Miss Townsend, your topic, I believe, was frequent change of meter in the same poem for special effects.'

"I have Dryden's Alexander's Feast as illustration," responded Frances; and she repeated a number of the lines from that poem, explaining the measures.

Some discussion followed about other poems; and the latter half of the hour was given to a lecture on English imitations of old forms of verse. Then the college clock gave out eleven slow strokes, and the class was dismissed.

But just as the girls started to go, Miss Folsom called out, "Pardon me, young ladies, but Professor Trumbull wished me to call your special attention to the notice on the bulletin board that the Shakespeare essays competing for the prize must be in next week. You may like to take advantage of this holiday to finish them.

The exact conditions for handing them in are given in the notice."

"What is all that?" asked Will of Ruth.

"Oh, some one—ungratefully enough, I have forgotten his name—offers annually a prize of three hundred dollars 'to that member of the freshman class that shall, within conditions determined by the head professor of English literature,' present the best essay on 'one of three subjects connected with the study of Shakespeare'—or words to that effect."

"Are you working for it?"

"Yes, Fran and I have both written on the Sonnets. I've nearly finished mine, and Fran hopes to get hers done this vacation. There are only a few of the girls trying, so there's some chance for us."

"Will," Ruth continued, when they were sitting in the hack, rapidly driving stationward. "I know Miss Folsom pretty well, you know, and I just took

her my paper to see if she thought it worth entering for the competition. You know, she is not one of the judges, so I asked her only for an 'expert opinion.' I've just slaved over the thing. I've read a whole shelf-full of books over at the college library, about all the various interpretations of the Shakespearean sonnets—whether they are allegorical, dramatic, or autobiographical, or *what!* And Miss Folsom said my essay was decidedly the best presented in the past three years—since the prize has been given, you know. Think of that, Will —and the chance for glory and *three hundred dollars!*"

"And what will you do with *three hundred dollars?*" asked Will lightly.

And then Ruth earnestly laid before him her darling plan of making the money to keep Fran at college for the rest of the year. "By another year her father may be able to send her again," she said, after explaining all the difficulties and needs of the case; "but if she

leaves college now, she will never come back again—that's Fran! And, Will, she needs the college life so, to bring out her best self. She is capable of such fine things here, and she would by the end of the course be 'fixed' in that higher life; but just now she seems capable, too, of giving it all up and going back home, just to 'go in for a good time,' as she calls it."

"She wouldn't take the money from you, though," declared Will, abruptly enough, as they were just drawing up beside the waiting train. But Ruth knew he would laugh at her, only to help her out.

They talked it over again that night, when Ruth—with a delightful sense of freedom from a 'ten-o'clock bell'—up after her father and mother had gone to bed, sat lazily in the same deep armchair where we first saw her, and with Will again standing before the fire. Ruth did not wish to have any one else know about it, at least till the prize was definitely lost or won.

Will walked back and forth slowly, and laying his hand affectionately on Ruth's shoulder as he passed, he said, "Ruth, the only way is to let Frances win it herself."

Ruth did not answer, but waited for him to go on.

"I know it will be much harder for you, especially because you will never have the chance of *knowing* whether you really would have won; and, then, too, because there is the chance of some third competitor carrying off the honor. But Ruthie, it's all you can do, and I think you ought to do it."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Ruth, very deeply disappointed by Will's way of taking it, yet slowly beginning to see the justice of what he said. "You and mother always see such particularly *hard* ways as the 'only way to do!' But I did want to find the noble-minded means of helping dear Fran, and now I've found it, I must take it. But, you see, I begin—to understand how much I counted on the

delight of getting the prize—and then unselfishly bestowing it upon Frances!"

"You see, you never thought of the position you were letting Frances take! Had you the right to count on her accepting a condescension like that? If she were a relative, it would be very different. She's not the girl to be helped that way, that's all!"

"It wouldn't be different!" exclaimed Ruth, hotly; "the Boffin Family *are* 'related!' "

"It's not the same thing, but that may take you some years to find out. The ties of friendship are a bond, but the ties of blood are different, when it comes to that sort of thing. All the point I am making, Ruthie, is made when you put yourself in Frances's place. And that's the real Christian way of being *generous*, isn't it?"

"Yes, Will," Ruth answered, for Will spoke always so impersonally and quietly that one could not feel angry at his words. "Your 'generous' and

mother's 'noble-minded' are the very ideals of my life, but you two have a trick of driving them home so unexpectedly!"

While this talk was going on at Homewood, the Bower was gay with Fran's festive "spread." A large wooden packing-box stood in the middle of the floor, with the cover half pried off, and sawdust and excelsior spread around. Fran had extracted two large, fat and beautifully browned turkeys, some Saratoga potato chips, a glass jar of cranberry sauce, a fruit cake, a nut cake, a maple sugar cake, a box of cookies, another of candies, two bottles of olives and one of "little gem" pickles, one dozen oranges, sixteen lemons, tiny packages of salt and pepper, and a carving-knife and fork!

All the girls left in the Hubbard—nine beside Fran and Our Mutual Friend—were collected in the Bower, and things were very lively.

Only one disaster marred the midnight revel. Fran, waving the carving-knife

gracefully through two or three fencing figures, brought it down upon the turkey's breast in fine style; but unfortunately it was sharper than she counted upon, and it cut also her own left thumb.

For a moment she lost herself in a dead faint, and frightened the girls so much that only one of them had the presence of mind to open the window and unfasten Fran's high collar. Then Nathalie thought of the salts standing in plain sight on the dressing-bureau, and, about as suddenly as she had fainted, Fran was herself again; she dabbed a bit of court-plaster across the troublesome thumb, and then plied her right hand with great success.

The girls ate and laughed and joked, and laughed and drank some more lemonade and ate some more olives; and dear, wise Mother Hubbard knew how the deliciousness of the revel would outlast the temporary stomach-aches, and let it go "for once!"

CHAPTER IX

THE "T. Q."

Laugh if you are wise.

—Martial.

WILL was easily persuaded into returning to Northampton with Ruth on Monday, prepared to stay over Monday night, and go to the "T. Q.'

"And what is the 'T. Q.'?" he asked, with a fine indifference.

"Why, it is the Hubbard House Society for getting up entertainments once in two weeks—the *Tertium Quid* in lawyer's phrase, or Third Unknown. Fran is the first freshman that has ever been chosen president of it, so you must be sure to come and give us some applause —masculine applause. She has written something original for this; she has not told even me what it is. She and two

juniors are in the secret. Fran won't act a bit herself, but she can write the brightest little plays!"

And this was how it happened that Fran and Nathalie and Ruth and Will Chittenden sat in "Row No. 4" of chairs in the Hubbard House parlor when the sliding doors opened and showed the "two juniors" of whom Ruth had spoken. They were sitting on an improvised platform in the little reception-room adjoining. The audience were told that the little play was a parody on the "dialogues" Socrates inflicted upon the Athenians—as Plato has reported them for later generations, and as the girls read them in the Greek class.

One of the actors, called "Thrasymachus," with her "himation," or outer robe, carefully draped from her left shoulder over a beautifully embroidered "chiton," or tunic, turned to the other, who was wrapped in a tunic ill arranged and dingy, and said pompously:

"O Socrates, I have come hither to-

day, to confute you in a matter about which I hear that you have a wrong opinion."

And then the dialogue went on:

Socr. And what is that, Thrasymachus?

Thras. The Ten O'clock Retiring Law, Socrates. I hear that you say that this law is both unjust and base.

Socr. *Πάνυ μὲν οὖν!* (Exactly so!)

Thras. And I do assert the very opposite of this.

Socr. In order that we may the more clearly understand this matter, Thrasymachus, let us consider the definition of a law. Is that a law, where the Many, meeting together, decide what is just and right?

Thras. Yes, most assuredly!

Socr. And is that a law which the Few, not consulting the Many, but being in power over them, do meet together and decree?

Thras. No, Socrates, that is not law, but injustice and tyranny.

Socr. Did the Many—that is, the

Students—meeting together, decide this law to be just and right? Or did the Few —that is, the faculty—being for the time in power over them, decree this, not persuading but coercing the Many?

Thras. O Socrates, I believe they did not consult the Many, for I remember that the law was written inside our closet doors when we came.

Socr. In order that I and these here may more clearly understand the matter, take the Bill and read it!

(*Much laughter from the audience, as a large pasteboard placard is lifted up, with huge letters done in shoe-blacking.*)

ALL LIGHTS TO BE EXTINGUISHED AT TEN O'CLOCK.

Socr. Let us, then, Thrasymachus—having proved this law no law, but tyranny and oppression—let us proceed to question its method. This clearly divides itself into two parts.

Thras. How so, Socrates?

Socr. Have we not the method of

obeying a law, and the method of causing it to be obeyed?

Thras. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν! (Exactly so!)

Socr. First, then, as to the method of obeying this rule.

Thras. Surely, there is no difficulty here. Putting out the light is putting out the light, and going to bed is going to bed.

Socr. Then turning out the light is not turning it very low and veiling the transom with a heavy cloth? And going to bed is not putting one's hair into curl-papers, and going down the hall to say good night to one's friends?

Thras. Assuredly not!

Socr. But this method gives to the Ruler the desired darkness through which to carry her candle? And is not the dark transom the sign of the occupant of the room being in bed?

Thras. It would seem so, Socrates.

Socr. And the *sign* is proof of the condition?

Thras. Oh, yes! for we have learned

that in Whately's Elements of Rhetoric.

Socr. Then, with regard to causing the rule to be obeyed. How are the offenders punished?

Thras. By kissing them good night. For the matron, upon seeing a bright light over any door, gently knocks upon that door, and with a tender admonition imprints a kiss upon the offender's forehead saying, "Good *night*, dear;" and passes by the door of the law-abiding.

Socr. Then do you not see. Thrasymachus, that you have proved this "law" to be both contradiction and injustice; in that turning out the light is found to be not turning out the light, and going to bed is found to be not going to bed; and in that the offenders are rewarded more than the law-abiding?

Thras. It does seem so, Socrates. And yet you are always saying that which I do not believe, and compelling my assent by crafty words.

Socr. We will then test this law by its

effect. Is that man a good herder of cattle who, on their being left in his charge, makes them ugly and useless, or more beautiful and useful?

Thras. Beautiful and useful, assuredly.

Socr. And is that stylograph a good stylograph which leaves the paper and fingers neat and beautiful, or inky and ugly?

Thras. Neat and beautiful, and not inky and unbeautiful.

Socr. Is the gas more useful and beautiful when it is "extinguished," or when it is shedding light about the room?

Thras. When it is shedding light, no doubt.

Socr. And do the girls become *more* or *less* beautiful upon proceeding to comply with the Ten O'Clock Rule?

Thras. Surely, less beautiful. For now I do remember that they do their front hair up in scraps of waste paper, and put old kid gloves upon their hands.

Socr. Then do you not see, Thrasy-

machus, that in coming here to confute me on a thing about which you know nothing, you have committed that worst of all errors, that of thinking yourself to be something when you are nothing?

Thras. I cannot answer you in this, Socrates; for you are skilled in making the worse appear the better reason. Yet I do still believe the Ten O'Clock Rule to be, not injustice and tyranny, but justice and truth!

* * *

The folding-doors slid together again, with much laughing and clapping from the girls and such of the faculty as Fran had inveigled into being present. But the audience soon scattered, for there was much studying for the morrow yet to be done, and the parlor was left to the Boffins.

"That was a clever thing," said Will Chittenden to Fran admiringly but shyly for so self-possessed a youth.

"Oh, I often think," Fran answered,

"how strictly collegiate a flavor creeps even into our fun here. There is an irresistible humor about it to ourselves; but it is not, I should think, very entertaining to outsiders.

"I am not enough of an outsider to miss the humor," said Will, a little piqued. "It is not so many moons since I was 'doing' *The Republic* myself. 'Not so far from us does the sun yoke his steeds!' "

"Forgive me," laughed Fran. "My cousin Gerald, who graduated from Harvard only last June, always talks as if undergraduate days lay in the dim past of childhood!"

"Oh, was Gerald Townsend your cousin? Know him well—saw him at the club last week."

Fran answered warmly: "Indeed, that makes us old friends. Gerald and his brother have been my chums at mud-pie making, and ever since that era."

A common acquaintanceship discovered always seems to form a bond quite out

of proportion to its importance; and Will Chittenden was almost a Boffin by the time the clock sounded the solitary note which stood for half-past nine, and reminded them of the Injustice and Tyranny of Ten O'Clock.

CHAPTER X

THE SHAKESPEARE PRIZE

All 's well that ends well.
—*Shakespeare.*

WITH beating hearts the competitors for the Shakespeare-essay prize sat in No. 4, "awaiting the verdict."

"I thought Ruth Chittenden was competing!" said one of the girls to Fran, who was trying her level best to keep up her usual nonchalant air, though secretly believing that for her more depended upon this decision than for any of the others.

"She did say she meant to," Fran answered, a little absently. "I don't know why she did not finish her essay, especially after working like a Trojan over it for several weeks. That much more

chance for the rest of us, for Ruth writes well."

"I wonder why she did give it up," Fran pondered within herself; but just then the committee's footsteps were heard coming down the hall, and a silence and an expectation fell upon the girls. Even then, underneath her excitement, Fran's thoughts ran on, while the committee bustled about and shuffled their papers. "It's about the only honor given in the whole course here—having no valedictories and such things — and Ruth's whole family would have been just tickled into little pieces if their darling should have won this! Poor as they seem to be, they would not have thought of the *money*, but the *distinction!* Ruth cares so much for that herself!"

And then the chairman of the committee, after the ordinary beginning about the "unusual merit of all the papers submitted," announced: "The prize is, however, without hesitation awarded to Miss Frances P. Townsend. By the

wish of the donor, it is presented in gold." And Fran, with tears in her eyes and the gold in her clasped fist, fairly "tore" across the campus, arriving quite breathless at the door of No. 34 Hubbard.

Ruth, who had watched eagerly for her at the window, knew from her pace and general expression that she had won, and neither of them thought much about the poor defeated ones, who were walking home more slowly.

"You *blessed* Mr. Boffin," Fran cried, as she sank down upon the "Trojan horse," with the same gesture that Ruth remembered when the *bad* news had reached her—a sort of abandon—"I've got it!"

"And I'm so *glad*," said Ruth; that was all she could find to say, but that she meant.

"Why didn't you go on, Ruthie?" asked Fran, after laying the gold triumphantly in Ruth's lap. "You might have been the winner. In fact, I believe

you would have been. Indeed, the best part of my paper was due to that suggestion you made about that allegorical and autobiographical stuff."

"It was only a chance," said Ruth, "and there was something else I cared for more than the chance I thought I had."

"What?" questioned Fran; "your general standing, do you mean? Of course, I've let that go frightfully of late —have flunked right along."

But Ruth went on, without answering her question: "Fran, just *think* what this means about your coming back. Oh, how I have hoped for it!"

And then Our Mutual Friend appeared, coming home from a music lesson; and there were more cheers for Mrs. Boffin's success; and the other girls came in with congratulations, for which Fran had not waited over at the college building. Then they all drank some lemonade in honor of the occasion, and left the Boffins to themselves again.

"To think that I can go home at Christmas and cheer the poor dear mamsie up—and then come *back* again out of *this!*" said Fran, dropping the gold, piece by piece, into a long steel purse and locking it up in her trunk. "I'm pretty sure it will be best all around for me to come back—and they don't really need me at home, as mamsie keeps saying. But I can see for myself, and if she just only *thinks* she *wants* me, I'll stay without a groan!"

Then Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat down to write some letters. Ruth's was to Cousin Will—a short note, but full of meaning:

DEAR WILL: Fran has the prize, and doesn't suspect. I am very happy about it, and I thank you for helping me to think of the right way to help her. Don't speak of it to *any one* but mother.

RUTH.

And Fran wrote:

Dearest père et mère: I've actually taken the three hundred dollar Shakespeare prize. If you think you can possibly get on with-

out my invaluable presence another term or two, I will plan to finish the year here. Anyway you might have Mr. Grover send me a pass, so I can get home at Christmas time. Two weeks from to-day I shall start —and we'll talk it over together.

With a hug for you both, and a kiss apiece to the boys,

Votre fille à mort!

FRANCES.

It is not much fun to go home for the holidays with a "condition" hanging over your head; so, in spite of ten-o'clock rules, supplemented by impromptu laws about not getting up before daylight (which process the president averred to be "absolutely unnecessary!"), a very considerable amount of "cramming" was done by most of the girls in that last week of the fall term.

Boffin's Bower was livelier than ever; but its spreads and sewing-bees were turned into what Fran named "cramming teas." Upon the outside of the door hung the ominous Pompeiian mosaic warning, "CAVE CANEM!" Inside, Frances pranced to and fro, chanting the

first sentences of a lecture, in such comical imitation of the Latin professor that the laughing freshmen, assembled to the number of nine, remembered the very wording for years. Every one with a sense for humor knows how it aids the memory.

"The great men; of every age; are formed and developed; by the influences at work; in society at large.

"Hence, to study; any author; we must first consider; the characteristics of the age; in which he lived; as an introduction; or more properly, a key; to what he has done.

"The peculiar characteristics; of the Augustan Age; are seven; which we shall discuss; in due order; as influencing the development; of our great historian; LIVY."

"I thought you said you couldn't act, Mrs. Boffin," said Mr. Boffin, reproachfully.

"That, my dear, was because I didn't choose to take part in that 'T. Q.'!"

"Oh, if you-all would only stop making such a racket!" wailed Nathalie. "I *must* go over this Greek. 'Up rose the much-enduring Odysseus, fertile in resources——' "

"And ate a gingersnap, in order to keep the blood from settling entirely in his brain," finished Fran, cramming a whole snap into Nathalie's unresisting mouth.

The Greek examination came at eleven Monday morning. At half-after ten Fran had gone down-town, and just as Ruth and Nathalie had seated themselves in the class-room, in two big armchairs, with a "question-paper" on the little book-rest screwed to the right arm of each chair, Fran slipped noiselessly in.

They were just beginning to write—Ruth calmly, Nathalie with her forehead puckered and every muscle tense—when Fran quietly put into the left hand of each a chunk of hot gingerbread; these they conveyed to their mouths. The professor seemed to be engrossed by

some work of his own at the desk, but suddenly, to their consternation, he decided to call the roll, and began rapidly:

"Miss Allen, B."

"*Present.*"

"Miss Allen, H. I."

"*Present.*"

"Miss Astor."

It seemed only an instant before he reached "Miss Chittenden."

"Gingerbread!" responded Ruth, inarticulately but very promptly.

"Mercy!" said Nathalie, in the same breath.

The professor had already said, "Miss Custance," but taking in the joke, he stopped and laughed heartily.

This incident went a great way toward relieving the tension of things, and all settled down to work. The brazen-faced Fran was smiling blandly, while Ruth and Our Mutual Friend blushed deeply and kept their eyes fixed on their stylographic pens.

Tuesday afternoon came the oral his-

tory "exam." The subject was "Outlines of Ancient History," and fifty topics had been given out for the review of the previous week.

"I shall get the first topic," Fran declared, "and I don't intend to study any of the rest particularly; of course, I shall glance at the others!"

"How in the *world*, Mrs. Boffin?" began the girls in a chorus of astonishment. "Have you bribed the 'prof.'?" "Is it a Hermann trick?" "Or hypnotism?"

"Never mind. Just wait!" was Fran's only answer.

Notwithstanding this prophecy, or because of it, the girls were thoroughly astonished when the professor, seeming to take the names just by chance, began:

"Miss Townsend, will you sketch the geography of the Tigris and Euphrates basins in the earliest historic period?"

Fran gave a long and detailed answer, with some rapid drawings on the blackboard; but she spoke with a nonchalance

that gave the impression of its making no difference which question she got. Ruth smiled, and "O. M. F." giggled convulsively.

"It's perfectly simple," Fran explained, walking slowly across the campus, surrounded by expectant girls. "He is so absent-minded that he can't trust himself to skip about in the class, and he doesn't want to go by the roll—that's too plain. You've probably noticed that when it's an exam or any special occasion in which it is important to get everybody in, he goes by a pattern of some sort—for instance, drawing diagonals, first chair, first row; second chair, second row, and so up to the end and back again crosswise, filling in the middles afterward; or he takes parallel lines or zigzags. But I have observed that on pattern days he always *begins* with the southwest corner. So I sat there!"

"But suppose he had taken you a second time?" said one.

"He always works back on his pat-

tern," said Fran conclusively; "so I knew he wouldn't reach me twice."

When the girls reached the Hubbard House, they stopped in the parlor to finish a discussion about cheating at examinations.

Fran held that girls were several degrees more honest than fellows. "My brother Peyton, when he was at college, never thought anything of it. Why, he said the profs allowed for it, and made out their papers accordingly."

"I never have seen any cheating done here," said one of the girls.

"No," said another, "that's the beauty of this place. Nobody watches you, or seems to expect you will need it."

"I do think," Ruth said, earnestly, "that for girls who have any honor in their composition, the freedom of Smith College is the *perfect* system."

"It's simply great!" cried Fran, and they all gave three cheers for Smith.

* * *

Ruth had persuaded Nathalie to spend

the holidays at Homewood with her. On Wednesday afternoon, all the Boffins left Northampton on the same train, to separate at Springfield, Ruth and "O. M. F." bound for Boston, and Mrs. Boffin for Chicago.

CHAPTER XI

THE BOFFINS AT HOMEWOOD

Awhile to work, and after, holiday.
—Shakespeare.

NATHALIE was warmly welcomed into the Chittenden circles. Aunt Bonnie Ray had said from the first that birds of a feather flock together, and that she knew Ruth's friends would be all that was desirable. And Ruth's having "picked out" so altogether charming a girl as Our Mutual Friend, certainly did go to prove that Aunt Bonnie had been right about Ruth's having arrived at the discretion which was necessary for facing the world without an older Chittenden at her elbow.

Ruth's own particular home group—her father and mother and Will and the little Elsie—grew individually attached

to Nathalie, just in those few short winter days. For, if the days were short, the evenings were so much the longer; and Nathalie would play her guitar and sing old English ballads or funny but fascinating darky songs, in the unlighted library, just before dinner and the last thing before bedtime—seemingly forgetful that there were so many listeners lounging in easy chairs and watching her sweet face in the fire-glow.

"How empty Boffin's Bower must look!" Ruth soliloquized aloud, one of these evenings; "the pictures all turning their faces to the walls, the teacups packed up in the old Trojan Horse, and the bookcases swathed in blue-and-white striped bedticking!"

"Yes; I've no doubt Tara's halls feel that the soul of music is fled," remarked Will, leaning over to poke the fire.

"We shall sadly miss our little minstrel when she goes," said Dr. Chittenden, in the tone which gave weight to his lightest word. Ruth had always felt an awe of

her grave, tall father, which kept her from the lighter caresses which she lavished on "little mother." But Nathalie, sadly longing for her own father, had from the first day an affection for the stately old man, and had drawn from him a gentleness of expression that surprised Ruth. Now, she laid her guitar on the table and, standing behind Dr. Chittenden's chair, patted and stroked his hair, and leaned over and kissed his forehead.

"Sing another negro melody," said Mrs. Chittenden, smiling fondly at the girl.

"A funny one," urged Ruth. And she sang, to a mournful chant-tune:

Jis' afo' de cherry blossom
Yo' mus' quit er eatin' possum,
An' den yo' knows what gettin' hongry means.

A-scrapin' an' a-rakin'
Fo' jis' a smell o' bacon,
An' jis' a leetle plate o' collard greens.

The next day came a letter from Fran, who was expected to come in person at

the close of the vacation, so that the three could go back to the Bower together.

She wrote:

The flat is a very funny affair. In the novelty of it, we have had hardly a chance to miss our dear old house. My small brothers spend their afternoons riding up and down in the elevator, to the distraction of the lower flatters!

To-day has been an uncommonly comical one; you will enjoy an account of it.

All the morning I had been chief cook and bottle-washer in the kitchen end of the flat, and was attired in a blue-and-green plaid gingham wrapper which I had just made for mamma, and I had my hair down my back in a braid—tied, I grieve to say, with a bit of black elastic.

There came an impatient ring at the bell, and I answered it. And there stood my "Aunt Majestic," as we always call her, because, when we were children, she used to stand so loftily straight and reach out one finger to shake hands.

She lives in New York, and she does not often venture so far west as Chicago! She had not seen me for years—since papa took me to call on her in New York, on our way home from Paris, when I was about thirteen. Of course, she did not know me.

So *she* said, "Is Mrs. Townsend at home?" and *I* said, "Won't you be seated, madam, and I will ascertain." Then I flew into mamma's bedroom, and told her the tale, and warned her against giving me away. Well, if you please, who should come in next but Aunt Phœbe, who has a sheep-ranch out in Dakota, and is perfectly reckless of conventions and of English, too, and can't *abide* the Majestic. She hadn't seen me, either, for years.

Of course, they both stayed for luncheon, and I waited upon the table.

I smuggled the boys out into the kitchen, when they came home from school, and gave them all manner of goodies as a bribe to stay there.

Well! the dear things sat down together. Fortunately papa did not come up for luncheon, or I should have given up the game; it is so hard explaining things to *men!*

I stood around at appropriate intervals, with the salads and things—and my salads are *not* such stuff as dreams are made of! So you needn't pity them. Then Aunt Maria Majestic said that she hoped that Frances had been toned down a little by our trouble; for as a little child she had had an irrepressible pertness of manner, and a way of jabbering French that was anything but agreeable. Mamma laughed

hysterically, and tried not to look at me. And Aunt Phœbe said, "She's a bright little piece, though—that's what I always say about Fanny. She's peart, but she's cute as a gopher! But then, she's such a mere child! She'll settle—gracious sakes, she'll settle!"

I vanished into the kitchen, for mamma was anything but happy, but she kept things going as well as she could till I got the face to go back and finish passing the Roquefort cheese.

Then Aunt Phœbe said: "You see, I haven't been east—to Massachusetts, that is to say—for three years, and I must say I'd like pretty well to go up and see Smith's."

And mamma told her it was *Smith*, knowing how I hate "Smith's!"

At last they got through with their eating, and everybody fell back to let the Majestic Maria get launched. And she slid into the drawing-room, and said she must hurry off to meet a friend at the Auditorium for the Philharmonic matinée. She had dropped in only to assure us that she would never desert us because Fortune had deserted us; and if there were anything she could do—; but mamma said we were getting on very well; whereupon she kissed mamma's cheek, and shook fingers with Aunt Phœbe—and *she* was off.

Then I went in and owned up to Aunt Phœbe, and she's laughing yet over it. And then I went to Field's and did a little shopping, and home to write to you before I get dinner.

Wasn't that a good little farce? But there! Aunt Phœbe wants dinner early, so that she can go to the Battle of Gettysburg cyclorama.

So it's good-by to you, dear Boffins! With the same feelin's, here or in the Bower.

Your

MRS. BOFFIN.

And Ruth wrote in answer:

MY DEAREST FRAN: We had all been thinking of the sad difference between the home-going at Christmas and this one for you, when your bright letter came. We see you are, as usual, making the best of everything, and getting fun out of it.

I do think, dearie, you are a wonder! And I take back most humbly all I once said about your not being a true college girl, because you liked "society" and home life. You are more of a real college girl than I; for you have shown the power to adjust yourself to life which is the aim of education—while I only preached!

Well, dear Fran, I'm prouder of you than of any other girl in our class. Nathalie said she would write a note to go with this

but she isn't to be found! So that must wait.

This letter will probably reach you just as you start for Boston. We hope to have you here for at least two days, if you can leave home so soon.

Lovingly,
RUTH.

* * *

Tuesday morning Fran came, in gayer spirits than ever, and exulting in tales of the dances and theater parties that had been given for her. "Papa" was so much better, and his old friends had all stood by him, and things looked extremely hopeful.

"Did you see anything of those two Chicago juniors?" Ruth asked, —"the ones that seemed so eager to call on you?"

"No, dear; I was out when they called. And I was glad enough. They're such sedate creatures, some way — too much like taking college home with me, like the Old Man of the Sea! You *know* I'm just joking, love," she added, kissing Ruth impetuously. "I love the dear

old Bower even more, now I've come so near losing it forever, and I'm simply pining to get back to its peaceful shade. As for Homewood, it's just the name for this place. I *knew* your home was like this; it's a picture and a dream."

Then they talked of Nathalie. "She is prettier here than at college. There is more chance for her, more background for her dainty ways. Will has quite lost his heart to the little witch! Something will come of that!" and Fran laughed one of her merry, audacious laughs.

"You do talk shockingly," said Ruth, a little nettled by Fran's remark, which she thought uncalled for and silly. But she could not help smiling at the look in Fran's eyes, and the irresistible dimpling of her chin. "Now put on that hat you say you look like a cherub in, so that I can forget your naughty ways."

Ruth and Fran were both in high spirits on the way back to the Bower. But Nathalie was decidedly sober in the train, as they sped across the state from

Boston to Springfield, now and again picking up groups of girls.

When they "changed at Springfield," according to the very loud and nasal directions of the brakeman, they found the Northampton car nearly full of Smith students; and for the remaining forty minutes they made things rather hard for such of the passengers as were of the "town" and not of the "gown"—although some of these were good-humored enough to enjoy the bright chattering and "Happy New Years" sent across them or over their very heads by girls oblivious of their presence.

That evening the bookcases of the Bower shook off their dismal bedticking, and the pictures no longer, like angry goddesses, averted their faces.

The three Boffins "straightened things out" and then hugged one another good night, with a curious mixed emotion. And that queer feeling settled down upon them that so often comes upon a return

to familiar haunts—that they had not been away at all, but had waked from a strange dream. So they began again, in the much loved though much complained of routine.

CHAPTER XII

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Go forth under the open sky and list
To Nature's teachings.

—Bryant.

"AH, *please*, Mrs. Boffin!"

It was two or three days after the opening of the term. Ruth complained of having "hardly caught a glimpse" of Fran, who had been flying around, seeing the girls and exchanging descriptions of the Christmas gayeties.

She had now seized upon Mrs. Boffin, as the girls left the Hubbard dining-room, and fairly dragged her up to the Bower.

"My dear Ruth, I never made a speech in my life. I *detest* societies and pledges. And as for promising not to wear the hat I look like a cherub in—the little pheasant turban—you might as well ask me to throw this dress away because very

possibly the sheep got snipped in the shearing. You're a fanatic, Mr. Boffin, like most men!"

"But Fran, dear, I ask you only to go to the meeting, just to lend your influence. You know you are a leader, and I need your help to get the girls together. If you do that, I'll let you off from the speech. And you need not sign the pledge. Only come over!"

"But I don't want to 'come over.' I've promised to play tennis over in the gym."

"Oh, Fran! it won't last more than half an hour or so; this is only a preliminary meeting. Nathalie has promised to go."

"Well, it's almost two now; so come along, and wipe that tear out of your soft hazel eye! Where's Nathalie?"

So all three Boffins walked across the campus to join the freshman class, urged by a notice posted on the bulletin-board to "come together in room No. 4, to consider uniting themselves with the

upper classes in forming a branch Audubon Society."

Ruth had gone into it, Fran said, with all the enthusiasm she could spare from her mill-girls. She had entreated the freshmen individually, "*please* to come," till she had gathered together thirty-eight of them. Half scared now by the size of her undertaking, she rose, after Fran had called the meeting to order, and began in a quaking but eager voice:

"Girls, you have doubtless seen in the papers of late, or have heard the upper-class girls talking about the Audubon movement throughout the country. It has grown rapidly. Societies have already been formed in some of the woman's colleges in sympathy with this movement, pledging their members not to wear the skins of wild birds as hat or dress trimming. I have prepared some statistics, showing the two great reasons for this crusade; one, a more purely ethical one, the cruelty of the methods by which the skins or feathers are obtained and pre-

pared; the other, the scientific reason, that most beautiful and valuable species of wild birds are thus being exterminated."

She then read from a tiny red leather notebook some figures, and told some tales that in the good old days of Æneas would have caused the listeners' hair to stand on end. Then she called upon one of the girls to read from a scientific magazine some account of almost incredible barbarisms practiced in skinning the birds alive, to preserve the delicate coloring of the feathers. Next she called for volunteer remarks.

To her amazement, Fran, the skeptic of an hour before, jumped up and said:

"Girls, when I came in, I had not the coldest sympathy with this thing, and now I am almost a convert. We see a kitten jump at the canary's cage, and we slap its paws, and say '*Naughty* kitten!' and hold up its natural and untaught impulse as a *crime* before little children with like cruel propensities! And then

we go down town and buy a little round hat, with canary-birds all around the brim, and unteach all we have taught the child —who very likely will say, '*Poor* little dead birdies!' "

Fran sat down as unexpectedly as she had gotten up; and a Miss Brownell now read from Longfellow's "Birds of Killingworth":

The thrush, that carols at the dawn of day
From the green steeples of the piny wood;
The oriole in the elm; the noisy jay,
Jargoning like a foreigner at his food;
The bluebird balanced on some topmost spray,
Flooding with melody the neighborhood;
Linnet and meadow-lark, and all the throng
That dwell in nests and have the gift of song,—
You slay them all!

* * * * *

How can I teach your children gentleness,
And mercy to the weak, and reverence
For Life, which, in its weakness or excess,
Is still a gleam of God's omnipotence,
Or Death, which, seeming darkness, is no less
The selfsame light, although averted hence,
When by your laws, your actions, and your speech
You contradict the very things I teach?

Then another girl, at a sign from Ruth,

read passages from a poem by Browning:

> What clings
> Half savage-like around your hat?
>
> Ah, do they please you? Wild-bird wings!
> Next season—Paris prints assert—
> We must go feathered to the skirt:
> My modiste keeps on the alert.
>
> *You!*—clothed with murder of His best
> Of harmless beings!

Then Ruth rose again, and said, with the eager, naïve enthusiasm which had already carried along with it the half-unwilling Fran:

"You see, girls, we have the poets with us! Now, I know that some of you are prejudiced against signing pledges. We ask those that *are* willing to pledge themselves to give up wearing birds' feathers (except ostrich-feathers, which can be obtained with no harm to the birds) to come forward and sign this paper, entering them as regular members of the 'Audubon.' Those who are willing to lend their influence toward the

support of this side of the question may —without taking any pledge—become associate members of the society. I do beg even those who have already bought birds to replace them with some other trimming, for the example of the thing. I feel as if I were pleading for little friends, and you would not need teasing, if you knew birds as I do!"

To Ruth's utter delight—and it meant *everything* to her totally loyal soul, now given up to the cause—there were soon eleven names signed to the unconditional pledge, led off by Fran's; which move that young lady seconded by going home and at once retrimming her "pheasant turban" with dark-green velvet caught into knots by tiny gold buckles.

"It is the dearest hat you ever had!" cried Ruth rapturously; "and you *are* a 'cherub in it!' "

CHAPTER XIII

NATHALIE'S BIRTHDAY

O gentle year, I'll not entreat thee stay—
Thou gav'st so much, and took'st but time away.

IF Nathalie had as many as two weaknesses, they were a tendency to lie abed in the morning and an inordinate fondness for apples.

On the morning of the sixteenth of January, which happened to be her birthday, she felt particularly loath to get up. The instant the rising-bell rang, on the stroke of seven, she heard the noise of sweeping in the hall just outside her door, and she was just conscious of thinking that the maid was making more racket than usual, when she sank back into that delicious half-waking state that we all know—when we are enough asleep to get the *rest* of sleeping, and enough awake to enjoy it.

She was half wakened again by the sound of the maid sweeping louder than ever; this time she reached out to turn the steam on, against the time when getting-up *must* be accomplished. She thought to herself again, "That servant is certainly doing this corner of the hall thoroughly this time." And then she took out her watch from under the pillow and saw that it wanted only five minutes to eight o'clock and the breakfast bell.

At about half-past eight she opened the door in such breathless haste as nearly to knock over a small table standing directly outside. Pinned to it was a small piece of white paper, saying:

> The maid her besom doth with vigor ply
> Lest our fair dreamer should suspect us nigh.

and she saw through the trick at a glance. "Fran worked that broom to cover the noise of the preparations, while the others arranged these things," she said, half aloud, to herself, as she began to pick up the "things." She had quite a race after the apples—one from every

girl in the Hubbard House—all tied to the door with long strings, at the end of which they merrily rolled off down the hall.

To each apple was attached some significant motto, in prose or verse, from the short dedicatory line—

TO THE APPLE OF MY EYE,

up to more ambitious efforts like this:

O Nathalie,
Fattily,
Never thy temper rumpling,
We sigh for thee,
Die for thee,
Thy teeth our fair skins crumpling;
For we are going to turn thee
Into an apple-dumpling!

On the table was a flourishing mullein-plant, in a big pot, with an elaborate white tissue frill around the top. This was from Fran, in memory of the fact that Nathalie had been detected cutting out from a newspaper a slip about rubbing one's cheeks with a mullein-leaf to give them color. (The very looking at the plant seemed to answer the purpose,

for Nathalie blushed scarlet on the spot.)

Beside the mullein on the table stood a beautiful Rookwood jug for flowers, with a card fastened to it, and Nathalie blushed again when she read this:

> This is for Thalie
> The friend of the Daly.

"Oh, dear! I *knew* Helen Daly would hear that when Fran said it the other day, after Helen and I came home from that walk together. Fran always has laughed at her, but it is *dreadful* that she should have heard!"

This thought flew through Nathalie's brain very quickly, and very much mixed with other ideas—how she really *ought* to be hurrying down to breakfast, and how tremendously surprised she was, and how she hardly *dared* to open that big florist's box yonder! Suppose it should be——!

And it was. And then Nathalie's cheeks reddened again.

"I don't believe you need the mullein after all!" cried Fran, appearing suddenly from around the corner; "but some

breakfast you do need; so run right along down, and I'll see to putting the roses into water."

Nathalie obediently resigned the Maréchal Niels, and contrived to slip the card—*Mr. William Randolph Chittenden*—up her sleeve; then she kissed Fran impulsively, and "ran along down" as ordered. She found Ruth, who had been waiting for her, the only girl left in the dining-room.

"You know Alma closes the folding-doors the instant there's no one here," said Ruth, "so I've been holding the place for you, kitten." But she could not make the excited girl eat a mouthful beyond half a biscuit and a bit of honey.

"Did you tell Will it was my birthday?" asked Our Mutual Friend very shyly of Ruth, as they left the dining-room arm in arm.

"No, duckie, I didn't have to!" laughed Ruth quietly; "he seemed to know by instinct."

"It was awfully nice of him!" Nath-

alie tried to speak very carelessly, but her voice trembled; and Ruth answered simply, "Yes, very nice."

Fran insisted on sticking all the roses into Nathalie's belt, when they went over to chapel. "We're coming back in an hour, and then you can put them in water, 'to keep,' " she reasoned; and Our Mutual Friend was almost covered up with them. One of the girls in the front seat whispered, as she passed:

"Though lost to sight, to memory dear," and poor Nathalie felt that her very thoughts were "read."

She did not remember, in the course of her whole life, ever to have had so blissful a birthday. Though the mercury was nearly down to zero, and she was known as the "shiverer," she now meandered slowly and dreamily, while the other girls walked as fast as their feet could carry them, back and forth between the college building and the Bower,—between recitations, which, I am sorry to say, were

mostly "flunks," and delightful surprises from the post and express.

When four o'clock came she sank down a little wearily on the Trojan Horse, and with a gasp remarked that she had "mixed things up hopelessly," and could never in the wide world tell who had sent what, or whom to thank; and, in fact, that she hardly believed *all* the things were meant for her at all!

"Now," said Fran firmly, "you go to your own room and take a real snooze; that's what you need to straighten out your ideas, and you can't sleep here!"

Nathalie was glad of an excuse to go to her room. She slipped in and noiselessly locked the door. Then she took out her writing-case and began her first letter to "Mr. William Randolph Chittenden."

DEAR MR. CHITTENDEN:

But that was as far as she could seem to get! She thought of other things to say, but could not make up her mind just how to say them.

It was supper-time when she at last sealed the little note:

DEAR MR. CHITTENDEN: Your remembering, or even knowing, my birthday is such a surprise! Thank you very much for the roses, which are of my favorite color.

Very sincerely,

NATHALIE PAGE.

College, Thursday evening.

She stole softly over to the college postoffice in the dark to post this tiny missive, and then back to the Bower. But to her amazement she could not get in! The door was locked, and Mr. Boffin from within called out, "Wait a minute or two;" and Fran added, "or ten or twelve!"

Here was another plot and surprise. The Boffins had arranged a Dickens party. Just as the gong sounded below stairs, and most of the Hubbardites started down for supper, about a baker's dozen of them, with a few girls from the other Houses, suddenly appeared at the door of the Bower. And, as the door flew open at a given signal, Our Mutual

Friend found herself in the midst of a crowd of real Dickens people — men, women and children. The "T. Q." costume-closet and the Boffins' lively imagination had worked wonders, and Nathalie found Fran thrusting some strange clothes upon her, before she could object, and then introducing her as "the real genuine John Rokesmith."

The Bower was arranged in strictest accordance with Mr. Dickens's description thereof. On one side sat Mrs. Boffin reclining upon cushions, with her feet upon a luxurious Turkish rug, while Mr. Boffin's end of the room was bare and masculine.

Everybody was there: Mr. Dick and David Copperfield, Silas Wegg and Mr. Pecksniff and Mr. Pickwick; Madame Defarge and Agnes and Dora and Little Nell; Oliver Twist and Uriah Heep and Nicholas Nickleby and Dombey and dear little Paul (a tiny senior with big, appealing black eyes); Sam Weller, Mr. Micawber, and all the others you can think of.

Fran made a sort of opening speech, explaining that she and Mr. Boffin had often longed to get outside of their own limits and meet Dickens's *other* people as "Mutual Friends," and that Mr. John Rokesmith's birthday had seemed an appropriate occasion.

Almost before she had finished speaking, Mr. Silas Wegg *insisted* upon reading aloud out of the "old familiar Decline-and-Fall-off-the-Rooshan-Empire," with an occasional drop into poetry.

Mr. Perker took his snuff from time to time, even at the most touching parts of the poetry. Mr. Fang, with his stern face and all his hair on the back and sides of his head (the crown of it being covered with a flesh-colored plaster, which threatened to fall off when he shook his head) called the assembly to order when the merry-making threatened to become riotous. The one-eyed Squeers walked around with authority in his eye, but every one shrank from him, which made him a bit uncomfortable (as it was a fact

he hadn't counted upon when he first put his uniform on!) and he envied the Brothers Cheeryble, to whom people on all sides came pressing forward with smiles and gratitude for some kind act discovered.

Miss La Creevy surreptitiously painted the portraits of all the people that stood still long enough (she had a knack at likenesses which made these sketches so clever that they kept every one in a roar of laughing applause); Miss Cornelia Blimber, with glasses and a far-away expression, was the very type of a blue-stocking, and kept her eyes fixed upon a note-book on Egyptian Architecture. Mr. Harold Skimpole tried to escape from her too evident scorn of his lolling figure, and Mr. Venus was excessively busy in one corner of the Bower arranging the contents of a telescope bag he had brought with him. "My working bench. My young man's bench. A wice. Tools. Bones, warious. Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian baby. Afri-

can ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Human, warious. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied bird," and so on, as far as there was room, for Madame Defarge would not move from a chair near by, where she sat, knitting, knitting, knitting!

In the intervals of the Rooshan Empire and Poetry, the Boffins served their veal pies and other viands, and Oliver Twist kept asking for more.

When the quarter-of-ten warning bell rang, there was a general groan of protest. But when the last group left the room, about one minute of ten, some one sighed over the unprepared lessons of the morrow; and Wilkins Micawber cheered her with his inimitable "*Something* will turn up!" and Mrs. Micawber promised to stand by her husband forever.

CHAPTER XIV

ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR

Grantiana speaks an infinite deal of nothing.
—*Merchant of Venice.*

"HERE'S another prize for you to aim at," remarked Mr. Boffin, casually, reading from the inside cover of a magazine, "Advertisements for Ivory Soap."

"Pooh!" sniffed Fran, "nobody ever gets those things! Still—how much is it, Mr. Boffin?"

"Two hundred dollars for the first prize. Of course you would take the *first* prize."

Nathalie sauntered in and hummed, in dreamy reminiscence of an *Acis and Galatea* recital, a merry little air, to which she sang the words, as she sat down to some sewing:

Oh ruddier than the cherry!
Oh sweeter than the berry!
Oh nymph more bright than moonshine night,
Like kidling blithe and merry!

Ripe as the melting cluster,
No lily has such luster——

"That sounds like stove-blacking!" interrupted Fran. "But listen to this!" and she took up the tune—

Oh whiter than white trillium,
Oh sweeter than sweet William,
Oh maid most rare since Helen fair
Made trouble in old Ilium!

Thy cheek is ever ruddy,
Thy skin is never muddy!
Pray tell me how—by rite or vow?
I 'd fain make this a study.

When life seems sad and cheerless,
My cheeks are bright and tearless!
For health's live glow,
Cure for all woe,
Use IVORY SOAP, the peerless!

"Oh, that's the *cleverest* thing!" cried Nathalie. "Are you going to try for the prize? Ruth and I were noticing the advertisement. You would surely succeed, Mrs. Boffin!"

"What do you think of it?" Fran asked of Ruth, turning seriously toward her. "It would be *great*, wouldn't it, if I could make some money that way toward next year? Do you think it is good, Mr. Boffin? You're a critic born."

"I would try it," answered Ruth, with her head judicially cocked on one side; "but I think it's a little bit too *classical.* Those people may know about Ilium themselves, but they will know that most people *don't* know or care."

"Yet they make great use of the rhythmic mystic roll of Greek words in their advertisements, don't they?" asked Fran, anxiously. "Especially in the naming of their wares. There's *Sozodont* and *creosote* and *somatose* and *caligraph* and even *bicycle!*" she glanced through the end pages of the magazine.

"Yes, but those are not references to the Iliad," objected Ruth.

"Well, I'll try another, and send two," decided Mrs. Boffin. "There's no law

against sending all you can write within the time, is there?"

"No," said Ruth; "there's no limit."

"Why don't the rest of you try at it?" Fran settled to work again, as she asked, and Our Mutual Friend answered by the monosyllable "Can't!" while Ruth said slowly, "It's not in my line. I don't know where you ever get all your ideas."

Fran scribbled a few minutes more, and then read out:

In the gloaming, oh my darling,
When the tea-bell soundeth clear,
Does it not remind you, Tommy,
Of the days so old and dear?

When our mother, oh my darling,
Called us from our work and play,
"Come and clean up now, my children;
We'll have supper right away!"

How she 'd curl my ringlets, darling,
And send you, her "pride and hope,"
For a jug of clear well water,
And a cake of Ivory Soap!

Still, though years have passed, my darling,
Since that happy time of yore,
IVORY SOAP "cleans up" our faces,
After work and play are o'er!

"That's the Romantic School," Fran declared triumphantly, as she finished.

"It's certainly not classical," said Ruth, "and it doesn't presuppose familiarity with the Homeric poems! Still it has, somehow — what Lamb would call 'the smell of the lamp!' "

"Oh, well," said Fran, annoyed, "do you suppose they're going to pay two hundred dollars for the sentiment, IT FLOATS?"

"Ah, but that is just what they do pay for, and what pays them, they say."

Here Nathalie threw some oil upon the troubled waters, saying, "I think both of those are just as funny as they can be, Mrs. Boffin."

And Fran, pacified, copied them on the spot; the very next day happened to be the latest chance for sending them.

As she laid down her stylograph to look for the address, Mary Gooding burst into the Bower, seized a "*Busy*" sign, hung it on the outside of the door, and

turned the key. Then she sat calmly down in a rocking-chair and remarked:

"There! I've escaped. I'm just pursued from morning to night by that Daly girl. *Sh!* there she is now! reading the sign. She's actually knocking; but don't you *dare* answer. The idea of her walking over a sign that way! But she'd walk over all our signs and our very bodies!"

"Those are my sentiments exactly," echoed Fran, when Miss Daly was heard retreating down the hall. "Nów, this Nathalie-girl is madly infatuated with the creature!"

"I think you're all as mean as you can be to her!" murmured Nathalie in a funny, sputtering little burst of indignation. "She *is* a little peculiar, about never wearing gloves and that sort of thing, and her red curls are very funny indeed. But she sings *comme un ange*, as Frances herself admits in French, whatever she says in English. And she's my friend; so the Boffins might surely be civil to her."

"You do look so much like a bantam hen, Nathalie, when you get a fit of sticking up for queer people that you like—it's really an awful temptation!" Fran doubled her fist in Nathalie's face. "Come along, and have a good fight. It's the only way to put the Daly out of your head."

"Now, Fran," expostulated Ruth, "we're *not* very polite to Miss Daly. Of course, the Boffins can't be expected to take to the bosom of the Bower every girl that attaches herself to the soft-hearted 'O. M. F.' So, Nathalie, do be reasonable." She finished rather inconsequently as the vision of the aggressive "Daly" came over her.

"Nathalie's so touched by that birthday present!" said Fran sarcastically. But she saw the tears coming into the big blue eyes, and quickly turned the subject by asking Mary Gooding about a heap of letters in her lap.

"Oh, I forgot!" said Mary coolly. "I saw the key left in Box No. 77, and

knowing Fran's habits I thought to myself, 'The Boffins' key!' So I opened the box, and brought the letters over; the post was just distributed. You'll see how impartial I am—some for all of you, which you may as well proceed to read, as I have two of mine own."

"That will wipe the tear from your liquid blue eye!" remarked Fran, tossing one of the letters into Nathalie's lap and winking wickedly as Our Mutual Friend glanced guiltily up.

Nathalie could not bear to open the letter before the girls; so she pushed it quietly into her pocket, and buried herself in another letter she had from her Aunt Beresford.

"Girls," said Fran abruptly, "I've thought of a perfectly *fine* trick to work on that Angeline McAllister—you know, in No. 26. Nathalie, though she's so tender of Miss Daly, will admit that a senior ought to be able to hold her own, and is lawful prey."

"Oh, fire ahead!" said Mary Gooding,

impatient for the scheme, for she greatly delighted in Fran's "larks."

"Well, you all know how much Miss McAllister bragged about knowing Matthew Arnold, when he was here last week—or her father knows him, which is the same thing. I found out through Jean Pettibone that she has sent him a note, asking for his autograph. The chances are against her getting it, as he doesn't do that kind of thing, they say. And *I* mean to send her one!"

"Have you any idea how he writes?" asked Mary, with keen relish of the idea, but doubt of its practicability.

"Why, of course! I've seen his autograph many a time under his portrait, and I remember it nearly enough. There's a cross over the *h* in *Matthew*, intended for the two *t's* and running to the top of the *A*, like this." She made two or three attempts, and showed the girls a successful one.

"Are you equally up on his epistolary style?" asked Ruth, laughing.

"Oh, I shall not attempt anything of that sort," said Fran severely. "Just a plain blank card of the finest quality and correct size, with *Truly yours*, comma, then the name, period, and underlined. That's the way I remember his signature."

And so it was that the same post carried off Fran's Ivory Soap poems and the autograph, which a friend in New York was asked to post from there "just upon Mr. Arnold's leaving New York."

Unfortunately, from a money point of view, the Arnold joke worked better than the Ivory Soap trial. Both "poems" were promptly returned upon the expiration of the time allowed for examining the verses entered for the competition. But the Matthew Arnold autograph was highly prized by its recipient and shown to every girl around, including the smiling Fran, by whose special advice it was tastefully framed with a "cut" of Arnold, which Angeline had found in an old Dublin University Magazine.

Several days later, Mr. Arnold—who really was a warm friend of Mr. McAllister's, though the girls had been skeptical on the point,—sent Angeline a graceful little note. And then it leaked out that the other was a forgery, though it could never be satisfactorily traced to its source.

Fran wanted to tell Miss McAllister—not in penitence, it must be admitted, but in the pride of success and the desire to "take her down." But Ruth and Nathalie made her promise *never* to disgrace the Boffins by classing them with "the silly freshmen that *do* do those idiotic tricks," such as rolling oranges up and down the hall to trip up the lofty-headed and unsuspecting seniors.

"I should be ashamed to look Mother Hubbard in the face," pleaded Nathalie; "she despises such things. *Please* don't tell her!"

"But isn't 'not telling' *more* of a disgrace?" asked Fran in mock earnestness.

"No; it would do no good, and it will

be forgotten, if anonymous," said Ruth positively. "It's no crime, of course, but I'm not proud of it as coming from a Boffin. You simply *must* not tell."

And Fran answered, nonchalantly, "I don't *intend* to tell."

CHAPTER XV

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

Honour pricks me on.
—*Shakespeare.*

BUT the next time Fran played one of her daring jokes she kept it even from Ruth and Nathalie. No one ever knew anything about it but Fran herself and Mary Gooding and President Seelye —that is, about the author of it, for the valentine was shown about very freely.

And this was the way of it. One of the professors had "conditioned" a girl in the junior class to whom Fran had taken a great liking. Miss Barrett was feeling very badly over it—her first condition in the whole course, and a very unlooked for one, as she declared to Fran at the dinner-table that she had answered seven out of the ten examination ques-

tions without a mistake, and a part of two others. (It developed afterwards that one page of her papers had been accidentally lost.)

The two girls sat next to each other at meals, and Fran's sympathies were much aroused by Miss Barrett's loss of appetite. She was taking it very hard, and was really ill over it and afraid to try another examination.

Unluckily Fran harbored the grudge against this professor for weeks—far longer and more deeply than if the disgrace had been her own. And when the fourteenth of February approached, she prepared for revenge.

She did not dream of telling Miss Barrett herself, who was too dignified and sedate for so unworthy a scheme; but she and Mary Gooding arranged everything in the quiet of Nathalie's little room, with the two unsuspicious Boffins sitting in the Bower.

As the subject upon which Miss Barrett had been conditioned was mineral-

ogy, Fran thought the illustration she executed at the top of the valentine peculiarly fitting. It was an exact picture of the pickle bottle that had come in her Thanksgiving box, labeled *Little Gems.* In it stood the professor, who had a feature or two so marked that the caricature of him was easy and very successful; and below was printed:

> Down his nose the salt tears trickle,
> Saddened by the deed he 's done—
> For he didn 't know the pickle
> Into which so quick he 's run!
> Salt and briny evermore
> Must his tears chase down before.

Below that was a sketch, done by Mary Gooding, of the junior class sitting upon the little professor, with the motto—

> Beware! Take care!
> This time she 's not a-fooling thee!

When the fourteenth came Fran happened to be sick in bed, overtaken by an untimely and severe attack of the mumps, which made laughing extremely painful! and which also made private interviews

with Mary Gooding practically impossible. Ruth, who had had mumps as a little girl, was installed as nurse, and hung over Fran, forestalling her wants. And Nathalie, likewise mump-proof, stayed pretty steadily in the Bower. Mary Gooding and Miss Barrett were the only other girls allowed to see Fran.

At last Fran risked telling Mary before the Boffins. "Girls," she said, casting a particularly grave glance toward Mary, who was sitting on the foot of the bed, "*what* do you suppose Miss Barrett told me this morning when you freshies were over at Greek? The juniors had a class-meeting called very suddenly before chapel to-day, and there was a paper passed around to every girl in the class. They're such an obnoxiously stiff and self-esteeming crowd that it makes it all the funnier. Guess what it was! A *ridiculous* original "comic valentine," sent to Professor Z——, out of revenge for his conditioning one or two of their strongest girls last term. Just picture it

to yourselves. Every dignified right hand was obliged to go down on that paper in solemn signature to the statement, "I know nothing whatever about the sending of this paper." Of course, the class as a class was simply furious, but individually, Miss Barrett, said, they couldn't help laughing at the prof for spreading the joke so."

Fran's face ached a good deal from a choked off laugh.

"What *was* it?" asked Nathalie, scandalized.

"Oh, there was a Little Gem pickle bottle with the prof standing in it; and then a sixty-headed figure labeled *The Junior Class* sitting on the prostrate gentleman."

"Well, I do think that was pretty silly," remarked Ruth. "It's probably one of those foolish muses, as they call themselves, over at the Washburn House."

"Yes; that's exactly what Miss Barrett said," answered Fran consciously.

"Oh, how dreadful!" sighed Mary, but she looked relieved.

Fran, however, felt less and less relieved, as she thought it all over. For, in its way, her conscience could be as stinging as Ruth's New England one. And between conscience-ache and face-ache she had a most uncomfortable time of it. At last she eased her mind by one of her impulsive resolutions, and fell calmly asleep.

The first day that she was up and about and had gone over to the regular recitations in the morning, she surprised Nathalie by walking into her little room with hat and coat on in the middle of the afternoon.

Nathalie was writing to Will Chittenden, and had just put down: "About the spring vacation, I'm not quite sure what I ought to do, though as I wrote Ruth's mother, there is nothing I should like better than spending it at Homewood."

She blushed in a distracted, embar-

rassed way, and said very hastily, "Why, Fran, you're not going out again!"

"Oh, yes, I am," said Fran, mischievously, "but if you're in any hurry about that letter I'll just sit down and wait for it and post it as I go by the college building."

"Oh, don't wait!" said Nathalie. "But where are you going?"

"I'm going over to see President Seelye," said Fran without hesitation.

"Why, what in the world is the trouble? You're not going *home?*"

"Oh, no; I simply wish to consult him about a little affair of my own," said Fran coolly; for she believed in the French proverb that the best way to keep a secret is to wrap it up in frankness. Nathalie concluded that it was about the term bill. "Of course," Fran went on, still sitting in a provokingly expectant attitude, "if your letter is going to be *much* longer, I won't wait for it!"

And Will, grieving over the shortness of that note, if he had known the facts

would have blamed Fran's teasing propensities for the shortness of it.

When Fran rang the door-bell at the president's house, he himself opened the door, just stepping out with his high hat in his hand, for one of his little strolls in the town, which he said were for exercise, but which the girls thought were also for purposes of general supervision.

"Ah, Miss Townsend," he said cordially—he always knew the girls' names and welcomed each with a genuine personal friendliness—"come in, come in! Is there something I can do for you? And have you quite recovered from the mumps?"

"Yes, indeed; and I will take only a minute," said Fran, more embarrassed than she usually was over anything; and they walked into the library, and he closed the door.

"I just came to tell you that I was at the bottom of Professor Z——'s valentine." Fran burst out with this sudden statement, in a panic of fear that she

might be tempted to make up some other errand, now that she really sat face to face with this courteous gentleman, and remembered his idea of college freedom and the "unwritten laws of good society."

"I couldn't let suspicion rest on any one else," proceeded Fran, while the president got his breath. "I—of course it's no *excuse!* but I liked Miss Barrett, and I felt indignant over her condition; and I just thought I'd give the professor a *mauvais quart d'heure.*"

"And now you are giving yourself the *quart d'heure,*" said the president very kindly. "Ah, that is the way things react on the doer. Well, Miss Townsend, I am most glad you have told me this. I shall see that nothing more is said about it. And when anything of the kind occurs again—I very much regret that these things come up to try my faith in my system—I shall feel pretty sure that *you* are not the culprit. The wise man is not he that never does a

foolish thing, but he that never repeats it. I may trust you for that?"

"You may, sir," replied Fran with great earnestness. She stood up to go, and clasped the president's hand with a warm feeling of relief and gratitude and loyalty that was not short-lived, impulsive though it was.

Then she went back to the Bower, and frightened Ruth by sinking down exhausted into the nearest chair and turning very white.

"Make me some cocoa, or something hot. I'm cold and a little tired," she said, kissing Ruth, who was bending anxiously over her. "And I guess I'll go to bed."

After that day Fran actually got the name of "The Discourager" from Mary Gooding; she so hotly vetoed two or three suggestions of unlawful doings, saying, "President Seelye is trying his best to believe in us, and I'm not going to make it impossible!"

And that night she surprised Mr.

Boffin and Our Mutual Friend by saying, with emphasis: "You girls haven't the least idea in the world how much good you do me. If I were in a different kind of crowd I'd be an entirely different girl."

"You're just the right kind of girl as you are," cried Nathalie, standing behind her and kissing the top of her head; "and I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about!"

And Ruth, who had been conscious of herself thinking something like what Fran had said, but was beginning to understand better the real and strong truth and generosity of Fran's nature, felt a pang of genuine humility as she looked at her with tears in her eyes, and said gravely, "Perhaps we are a good deal better for having *you*, Mrs. Boffin!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE CLASS PIN

He shows, on holidays, a sacred pin.
—*Dr. Young.*

THE bulletin-board hanging in front of the "postoffice" on the first floor of the "college building" had the notice, "Freshman class-meeting in No. 4 at two this afternoon." The clock in the tower above was just striking two, and the freshmen were assembled almost to a girl, for excitement ran high over the proposition for a class pin.

Herein lay a chance for "'8—" to distinguish herself! Something classical and at the same time unique; something designed by Tiffany or by Bailey, Banks, and Biddle—and yet inexpensive! That was what they needed. But how to get any two of the girls to agree on any

particular one of the designs that had been "requested" by the committee for consideration and sent from all over the country! That was the tug of war.

Fran made a very good president. With her tall, dignified bearing, emphasized by a perfectly fitting tailor-made gown of dark green, and her hair done high on top of her head, with a tortoise-shell pin lifting itself still higher, she really looked "the president." When she called the girls to order they came to order. She had the magnetism that commands.

What was still more remarkable, she kept the girls in order, excited as they were, while the rather tedious minutes of the last meeting were read, and then while the chairman of the pin committee exhibited the enlarged designs, with price and other particulars of each.

Some of these designs had been drawn originally by the girls, and others were sent by the artists of the competing firms. There were twenty designs in all. As

each was shown, time was given for general discussion and remarks.

The first design was the class motto, with its ancient Greek letters cut in beautiful enamel, shaped to the figures "'8—," the enamel in white against a violet background. (The class colors were violet and white.)

"That figure 'eight' makes such awkward reading," said one of the girls. "You have to stand on your head to make it out, the motto *twists* so!"

"That is to give a hint of the wisdom of the serpent," answered somebody.

"The colors come out well," said a third.

"That is the simplest of all the designs," remarked the chairman of the committee, presenting a second for debate. "*This* is the most elaborate." And there was a chorus of murmurs, "I should think so!"

This might be called a statuette in gold and silver, representing Minerva (about half an inch high) issuing full-formed

from the head of Jove (who was an inch high), with the class motto issuing in turn from Minerva's head in a sort of wreath that wound around the whole design, while the two class figures were clasped in Minerva's outstretched hands.

The sight of this marvelous creation sent the class into a perfect fever of wit, till Fran reminded them in firm tones that this repartee brought them no nearer a decision, and must be postponed till after the meeting.

The girl that had been present at the Dickens party as Silas Wegg, under which name she had gone ever since, couldn't refrain from "dropping into poetry—as a friend"—to the effect that she—

> feared the lovely Pallas
> Would bear them an undying malice

if they trifled so inartistically with her image. But Fran promptly squelched Mr. Wegg, and encouraged the committee to continue the report.

Then was shown a dove that was "not

quite so expensive!" but "looked too much like the great American eagle"; then a combination of dove and serpent that had its adherents, but was thought by the majority to be a little trite; and a number of monograms, varying in size, price and elaborateness.

At last the vote was taken and, wonder to relate, was decisive, though not quite unanimous; it was in favor of a simple but artistic monogram, "S. C." (for Smith College), combined with the figures "'8—." An accompanying design for letter paper had the motto below, which was engraved in tiny letters on the back of the pins.

"The next subject to come up," said Fran, "will be rather a surprise to most of us. In fact, I was told of it myself only a few minutes ago. As you are all aware, to-morrow will be the twentieth of February, and we shall have a holiday on the twenty-second. That leaves the evening of the twenty-first free from lesson-preparation. Two of our girls have

arranged a little scheme for entertaining the sophomores, in recognition of the reception given to us last term. The originator of this idea, Miss Arbury, will kindly explain her plan, and we can then take some action on it as a class."

Miss Arbury at once rose and set forth her idea. "I thought we could have the 'gym' that night, and of course from the limit of time everything will have to be of an impromptu nature; so the faculty committee on entertainments can't be down on us for consuming too much of our valuable strength and time in frivolity! (Applause, and cries of "Go on! What is it?") "'It' is *The Canterbury Tales of the Nineteenth Century.* My notion is to have the stage fitted out as the saloon of a steamer from New York, which is carrying a 'personally-conducted' party—not exactly to the tomb of Thomas Becket, but very likely to a number of other tombs. The passengers are intended to represent our century as Chaucer's characters represented

his. They are in mid-ocean, and one evening all the passengers agree to meet and entertain one another with some characteristic speech or story. I've begun the prologue, which, with the permission of the president, I will read."

Fran nodded, and Miss Arbury went on:

PROLOGUE.

When that the sunny June doth take her way—
Preceded by her gentle bridesmaid, May,
Who handeth her the roses fresh and sweet
With which the bridegroom Summer fair to greet—
When that the Zephyr breatheth soft and low
And causeth every plant to leap and grow;
Then cometh impulse unto youth and age,
Across the sea to maken pilgrimage.

Befell that in that season, one bright day,
A steamer, new and strong, in harbor lay
That hight *Columbia*. And aboard her came
Full many a passenger, of various name:

A *kodak-fiend*, of pastures new in quest,
(You press the button and we do the rest.)
A *woman lawyer*, stately, stern, and tall,
In robes of scarlet for the judge's hall.
A "*swell*" she viewed with quite superb disdain
Who followed, open-mouthèd, in her train,
And sucked his stick with smile would-be serene.

When disconcerted by her glances keen
He turned for comfort to a *lighter maid*
Who laughed, and on her cheek a dimple played.
Then *Mrs. Rorer* walked serenely in,
With chafing dish, and apron to her chin.
And then the *indispensable*, the match
Whom scheming mothers tried in vain to catch,
Whom passing seasons never can dethrone—
Who leads the german, rules, and rules alone!

"That is as many girls as I have thus far arranged with, but any one that is willing to take a character can be worked in upon application.

"The kodak girl will have her camera with her, of course, and can tell stories of her experiences, and between times keep up an amusing byplay of 'snapping' the other characters when they get a good pose. The old bachelor can make a very good thing of *his* experiences. Mrs. Rorer can give a cooking-lesson, with the materials all there, *real*. The woman lawyer has a tale of her first case ready.

"I hope you will suggest other characters promptly, so that I can immediately finish up the prologue. My idea is to

have the general prologue read by Miss Townsend, while the characters appear in slow procession from the room back of the stage, each just in time to answer to the description in the prologue. Then short individual prologues, also read by Miss Townsend, will introduce each speaker's tale." Miss Arbury bowed gravely to Fran and sat down.

"Then I shall have to be the personal conductor," said Fran, "got up in immaculate style and speaking fourteen languages at once." Miss Arbury's idea was then officially put to vote and unanimously accepted, and the meeting at once adjourned, to give a chance for more informal arrangements of the characters and costumes.

Nathalie finally decided to go as a minstrel, and sing to her guitar—

> A wandering minstrel, I,—
> A thing of shreds and patches.

Ruth was to be the bachelor maid, and Mary Gooding and her room-mate and five other girls were the Seven Sutherland

Sisters, with their beautiful hair down their backs, while Mary told the merits of their hair-tonic. Then there were added ten or twelve other personages—the bicycler, the reporter, the stump speaker, the candidate, the football enthusiast, the Christian Scientist, the soulless corporation, and half a dozen authors and artists.

The stage in the "gym" had to be considerably enlarged to allow room for all the characters, especially as Mrs. Rorer had her table and cooking utensils with her, and the seaside artist filled one corner with his easel and a dozen unfinished sketches.

But the impromptu nature of the whole thing excused a little confusion; and the various "tales" and songs were so encored that the birthday of the Father of His Country was within an hour of Northampton before it was all over.

CHAPTER XVII

TOBOGGANING

The snow had begun in the gloaming
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence deep and white.
—*Lowell.*

BETWEEN the end of the winter weather and the opening up of spring the days in Northampton, as in many other places, become decidedly uncertain, and one can never tell ahead of any special day whether it will belong to the declining or to the advancing season.

One day in the first week of March there came a sudden and steady snow storm. After heaping great drifts and piles of white upon the grass, just beginning to grow a little green, throughout all that day and night, the next day turned out balmy, and the sun of midday had just time to soften the snow to

a sort of sponge and melt its surface, when the cold wind of the evening froze it over into a hard, firm crust, which glistened enchantingly in the half-lights of the young moon.

Now for purposes of coasting, the long, gradual slopes back of the Hubbard and Washburn and Hatfield Houses, with this glittering crust extending off as far as one could see, could hardly be surpassed. This idea, like all great discoveries, occurred to two or three leading minds at about the same time, and several distinct groups of girls, freshmen, sophomores—yes, even juniors and seniors, were detected hurrying through their suppers, on the evening's sport intent.

"Do be quick!" cried Fran, rushing out of the Bower, as Ruth entered it after tea.

"What in the *world?*" and "What *have* you got there?" came from the astonished Mr. Boffin. For Mrs. Boffin held in one hand a small rocking-chair and in the other the square of oilcloth

which had been placed by the college authorities before the bureau, and had been carefully covered by Mrs. Boffin, in one of her "high flights of Fashion," with a Turkish rug.

"Never mind, just hurry along!" Fran cried, breathless with exertions which had evidently been violent, and the nature of which was hinted at by a tack-hammer and some bent and broken tacks lying (perilously enough) strewn over the floor.

"Why, stop a *minute*, 'Old Lady,' " insisted Mr. Boffin; "you surely must tell me what you're up to, with that chair and that wretched piece of oilcloth! The college will sue the Bower for that!"

"Well, if you must know," said Fran, with extreme impatience, "my dear Noddy" (this was her wheedling name for Mr. Boffin) "I am going to *coast*, and I wish to get there early and secure a good hill. You two can join me at your leisure."

Ruth turned as reproachful a look as she could possibly summon after being

called "Noddy," and said, "Why, Fran, have you quite forgotten you had an engagement with me for this evening?"

"An engagement with you! *What* engagement was it of a nature to compete with *coasting?*"

"Why, Mrs. Boffin, Old Lady, you promised to go to call on that poor little Miss Wickham that lives down beyond Round Hill."

"Ruth Chittenden, do you expect me to do *that to-night?* Why, that can be done any time at all, and this is one night in the three hundred and sixty-five for coasting!"

"But, Fran, you know you've kept putting it off and putting it off till she is actually the only girl in the class upon whom you have not made a presidential call. I don't really think it was right, anyway, to leave just that kind of girl for the last! She certainly needed it more than did any girl on the grounds, not to speak of girls that board in houses outside, where they have as good a time,

in their way, as here. But she and those two other creatures—they are seniors, I believe—are running that little four-room house by themselves, they say. And it's pretty hard lines, you'll admit; they're trying to do it on four dollars a week apiece!"

"However that may be, it is *nee ici nee lah*, as my beloved mother pronounces it, and it has nothing to do with the case. I'm going on, and you can slowly make up your mind whether to follow or not. 'O. M. F.' has promised to come. *Au revoir* and *auf wiedersehen!*" She picked up her chair again and was off.

Then Ruth suddenly realized that she had been rude and unreasonable, and that her pressing the point of going to call on Miss Wickham had not really been for Miss Wickham's benefit at all, but only out of impatience over having her own plans upset. Ruth was a little old-maidish about these same "plans" of hers. Fran often told her that she would

never get on in life unless she could make her plans a little more elastic.

"Of course," she said to herself, though she would have found it almost impossible to confess it to any one else, "I was thoroughly unreasonable, because I would not even admit that the circumstance altered the case; and, moreover, I was dishonest, because I did not give the real reason for my disagreeableness. All there was in it, was that I was taken aback by the change in my pet 'plans'; and I said that about Fran's putting Miss Wickham off so long just for a nasty little dig which I knew she would feel. It seems to be a case of what mother says people do—have charity for the poor and none for their home people."

After this soliloquy, which seems long in the telling, but which took only a minute or two in the thinking, another idea came to her, and she jumped up and quickly knocked at Nathalie's door. Our Mutual Friend was engaged in putting a pair of leggins over her shoes.

"Oh, Thalie," Ruth said, pleadingly, "I've an idea; let's go over and get that Miss Wickham we meant to call on, and bring her up for the fun!"

"She's a good way off—" Nathalie hesitated.

"Oh, yes; but it won't take so very long, and it's early yet. She will enjoy it so much to be asked, even if she doesn't come."

"Yes, I'll go," was Our Mutual Friend's amiable answer, on second thought; and the two set off without delay.

When they knocked at the door of the little "story-and-a-half" house, they got no answer, though a light gleamed through the windows. Ruth boldly walked in, and Nathalie followed.

Miss Wickham they found sitting in the little "living-room," into which the front door opened without a hall or even vestibule. Her eyes looked suspiciously red, and in her left hand was a little wad

of very moist handkerchief. With her right hand she seemed to be turning the leaves of a Greek lexicon, propped up on a chair before her, while she was seated on a small sawdust-leaking hassock with the *Memorabilia* on her knees.

She looked at the girls with surprise and a sort of suspicious expression in her snapping black eyes.

"How do you do?" began Ruth, with a cordial manner, as if she were the hostess; "I'm so glad to see you!"

"Are you studying your Greek?" ventured Nathalie.

"No; I'm blacking my boots," said Miss Wickham, coolly.

"We didn't come exactly for a call," continued Ruth. "We——"

"Oh, did you want some sewing done?" said Miss Wickham. And then as a look of amazement flashed over the two faces looking down at her—for she had not risen from the hassock—she blushed crimson, and went on: "I thought perhaps you had heard. We

girls have been doing some sewing to eke out our existence—and——"

"Well, put your Greek and your sewing out of your head, as we are doing with our own!" said Ruth, kindly but not patronizingly. "We came to get you to go up to the campus to coast. Ever so many of the girls are out. Hurry, or it will be eight o'clock before we get there!"

Mary Wickham was a New England country girl, and the very suggestion of coasting made her blood tingle.

"But I don't know my Thursday's Greek," she said, losing in a breath her shyness and distance, and jumping up, as if now on common ground with those "stuck-up campus girls."

"You can stop with us over at the Hubbard to-morrow, after your rhetoric division at twelve, and we will make short work of it together," responded Ruth in a matter-of-fact way.

"And there is some sewing I ought to do to-night!" and then the distance and stiffness came back into her figure.

"Oh, I know all about that," said Ruth in the same matter-of-fact tone. "Don't you remember, Nathalie, when we were trying to earn enough money for Mountain Day, how the orders for shoe-buttons and such things always came in at the most inconvenient moment? But there is a time to study Greek and a time to sew, and *this* seems to be the time to *coast*. So hurry!"

Miss Wickham "hurried," while Ruth inwardly wondered what Fran would have thought if she could have heard her new arguments.

When the girls joined Fran they found the oilcloth toboggan already much the worse for wear. But Fran had laid hands on a snow-shovel; and tin pans and dust-pans, and even atlases were carrying the girls down the slopes. One dignified senior, far from the madding crowd, was pulled around by a freshman devotee on the levels above. Fran's rocking-chair had lost the end of one rocker in a drift, and lay discarded at the top of the hill.

Mary Wickham contrived a "double-ripper" out of four tin pans and two boards, and she and the three Boffins mounted on it; but half-way down it came to pieces. Nathalie, wildly reaching out her hand to catch Fran's succeeded only in "giving her the mitten," as Fran expressed it, and then slid rapidly and helplessly upon a tree.

But Mary Gooding was the only girl that had any serious mishap. The poor girl knocked out two of her front teeth, and is still, I suppose, going her way with two manufactured ones (of superior whiteness and regularity).

President Seelye came out, toward the end of the evening, and smiled upon the frolic. He *may* also have taken mental note of the number of oilcloths gone to tatters, for the very next vacation these were carefully replaced by brand new ones, as superior as Mary Gooding's new teeth in brightness and flawlessness to the old; and a slight tax was levied upon the despairing inhabitants of the rooms.

CHAPTER XVIII

BELLA WILFER

O friends whose hearts still keep their prime,
Whose bright example warms and cheers,
Ye teach us how to smile at Time,
And set to music all his years!

—*Whittier.*

THE next day, at exactly five minutes past twelve, Mary Wickham knocked timidly at the door of the Bower. All three Boffins were waiting to receive her.

"You're a duck to come," said Fran, arranging her on the Trojan Horse among the cushions, as if she were a doll. "You're such a tiny little creature and have such a little bird head I wonder where you keep that great mind of yours!"

"Is she making fun of me?" asked Miss Wickham, lounging comfortably. "I don't much mind if she is! It's so good

to hear any one say I have any mind at all. Oh, girls, I've simply got to tell somebody, or I shall go distracted!"

"Why, what is it?" asked the three girls almost in a chorus.

"Well—I never had such a thing happen to me before in my *life*, but I've had a 'warning'—if you know what that is!—in Greek."

"Not ghosts?" suggested Fran.

"Oh, it's *real* enough. You see, I had no teacher in Greek preparatory, and I got it up by myself—and not very scientifically. And Professor Tyler let me through on last term's work in the Odyssey. But I had a note from him yesterday morning, saying that I must really do better on the *Memorabilia*, or I would have to take a 'condition' and read it over again with a private tutor, if I wished to go on with the class. Oh, *dear!*" and the little head went down in the cushions, and the carefully wound braids of black hair tumbled recklessly apart. "I might as well be Pleasant Riderhood!"

she said, picking up a hairpin and laughing—with the tears still rolling down her cheeks.

"Then you'd be in the same book with us!" commented Fran comfortingly. "Do you know Our Mutual Friend?"

"Brought up on Dickens," said Mary.

"Well, this is Boffin's Bower you're in! and this is Noddy himself, and this is Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Rokesmith." She gravely introduced the others and then herself in the same tone. "This is Mrs. Boffin, the High Flyer at Fashion!"

"Why, in *that* case, I must be the Orphan they were looking for!" said Mary, with a chuckle; "for you've taken me in and made me happier and more at ease than I've been for one minute before since I came to this place!"

"Oh, I know who you are," said Nathalie, thinking how strange it was that she had never noticed in the class-room how extremely pretty and attractive Miss Wickham was, "you are Bella Wilfer!"

"You *are* Bella Wilfer from this hour,"

proclaimed Fran solemnly. "So you'll be obliged to stay at the Bower a great deal to keep up the part properly. And, what is more to the point just now, you'll have to stop for dinner to-day. It's half-after twelve now. I'll run right down and speak to Mother Hubbard, and ask her to put you next to her at the table. I want to have her know you."

"Oh, I never can! What would become of the two girls at home, without me to help about the things?"

"Oh, let them do 'things' themselves to-day," said Ruth, knowing that Mary, being the youngest and the freshman, did more than her share. "And some time when they're invited out, the Boffins will go down in a body and do the 'things.' And now let's begin the Greek." She knew that working together would make "Bella" at home more quickly than anything else.

"What made you—*truly*, now!—say that about my having a 'great mind?'" asked Bella of Fran insistently.

"Why, we've all noticed how well you do in Literature. I never thought about you one way or the other in Greek; but 'Lit' is much more a test of your *mind.* Greek, is mostly 'fit,' you know. Now Ruth, there, with her Boston Latin school, doesn't really deserve any credit at all for reeling this Xenophon off by the page as if it were in her native tongue!"

"The Boston Latin School Fit is at your service," said Ruth, smiling, "if you would like to study the *Memorabilia* every time with us. We can easily arrange it."

"And the genius of Our Mutual Friend," added Fran to Ruth's offer, "and my own well-stocked memory."

"All this about memory and the *Memorabilia* reminds me," remarked Nathalie, "that I've just finished gluing up the Boffin 'Memorabil' Book. Let's show it to Bella now; it's too near dinner-time to begin studying, and there will be time enough for that after dinner."

So out came the book from the depths of the Trojan Horse, from which Bella Wilfer had to be temporarily dislodged. A fat, red-covered scrapbook it was, with a quarter of an inch left in the binding, every now and then between the pages, for the bulkier souvenirs.

On the outside Nathalie had put, in large gold letters, MEMORABILIA OF BOFFIN'S BOWER, and on the inside page, "*Kept by John Rokesmith, Secretary for Mr. Boffin.*"

Mary Wickham, who had not seen any of the girls' "Memorabil" books, was perfectly delighted with the idea.

First came three double pages devoted to the sophomore reception, the first "event" after the book had been opened. The invitations were there; some of the flowers, pressed; copies of the songs; bits of the dresses worn by the three Boffins, with a funny tintype taken of them in the same gowns; names of the girls met for the first time, with "impressions" done by Fran. "And here *you*

are!" cried Ruth, a little dangerously, before she read the impression! She was so surprised to remember that Mary Wickham was on Fran's list. And there she "was:" "Little scrap of a fresh, with black hair and eyes, dressed in an old-fashioned Dresden silk, evidently made from her mother's wedding-gown. Very bright talker, but too sarcastic for me! Evidently found me inquisitive. A regular oyster herself, as to her origin, boarding-place, or habits of life."

Mary laughed heartily, not in the least hurt by this graphic description.

"We have so much fun sometimes reading over these old 'impressions,' after we come to know the girls better," said Nathalie in her conciliatory way, afraid that "Bella" might feel the part about the old silk gown.

"The funny part is that it *was* my mother's gown," said Mary, laughing again, "and not well done, for I did it myself before the looking-glass. But I didn't dream that any one would pay

enough attention to me even to remember my name. I went all alone, and I did so wish I *hadn't*—I felt so forlorn, and the girls all cut me the next day."

"Oh, I didn't remember many of them the next day," said Fran. "Now, did *you?* And, what's more, young lady, you acted so particularly offish that no one would have supposed for a minute that you wished to keep up her acquaintance, even to the next day."

Next in the book came some sketches by Fran and Nathalie of the professors in characteristic attitudes; one, with his rubbers, of no mean proportions, planted squarely side by side on the platform, where he daily placed them before beginning the recitation; another with his ankles twisted about the legs of the table behind which he sat, in an extremity of nervousness; another standing before the blackboard with bits of red, yellow and blue chalk in his hand, just saying, "The different divisions of this subject we shall

indicate by these differently colored chalks."

"Oh, that's capital!" cried Bella Wilfer, seizing the book, and rapidly drawing another little sketch in one corner with a lead-pencil. "There! Do you recognize that?"

"Oh, good!" said Fran. "It's the prex, himself, coming into chapel just as the doxology music begins. You've done the way he shuts the door *exactly*. The music is *just* starting, *now*."

On the next page came "Fran shutting the window" and "Ruth managing the radiators" in Professor Trumbull's room.

Then the Mountain Day "memorabils;" then "exams;" two pages on Nathalie's birthday, including a pressed mullein-leaf; and four or five pages of "T. Q." and "Olla Podrida" programs. "The 'Olla Pod' is the entertainment club over in the Washburn, you know," said Fran; "and the 'T. Q.' is here in the house. Sometimes we have tickets sent us for the

'Olla Pod.' And you must come to the 'T. Q.,' by the way. I'll send you a ticket the next time I get one, Bella."

The rest of the book had to wait, for the dinner hour came, and the girls took Bella down to introduce her to "Mother Hubbard" before dinner. "Mother Hubbard" was as much taken with the child-like, trustful little ways of "Bella Wilfer" (now that she forgot to be on her guard!) as the Boffins were, and all her reticence and pride seemed to have fallen off. She looked very happy, as she sat down at the table, next to "Mother Hubbard" and opposite Nathalie. She was only sixteen, and very much of a child; and she quite forgot her troubles in the delight of becoming a Boffin.

After dinner the Boffins were invited into "Mother Hubbard's" private reception room for a while. She was embroidering some roses from life, and the girls watched and admired while they talked. "Slightly different from the continual doing of the dinner dishes," whispered

Mary Wickham, as they mounted again to the Bower, this time to begin the Greek in earnest.

They studied for an hour or two, and Bella was amazed to see how the Boffins read it almost at sight. They went slowly, on her account, and explained things that she had never heard before.

"You see, of course, Professor Tyler can't go back to all these things now," she said apologetically. "He just expects us to know them when we come. But I had the grammar my grandfather used, and old-fashioned notes, and they never mentioned any of these things."

After the Greek, some of the cooking-class girls came in; and Bella, being particularly "up" on that branch of science, begged to be allowed to make something. "Anything you can get out of the Boffin larder," said Fran, showing a tin box of wafers, a paper bag of raisins, some sugar, eggs, tea, chocolate and a can of condensed milk.

"I'll make some little tea-cakes,"

she concluded, with one of her quick, bird-like turns of her head; whereupon she chopped some raisins, mixed in some sugar and the beaten white of an egg or two, and spread the mixture on the wafers, browning them in the chafing-dish with a little butter that Fran begged from the kitchen.

"You will cut me out, quite, as a cookery teacher," said Fran; "and as I have told them *all* I know, you might take the class for a few times now, and then we'll call them graduated."

"With a diploma," said Bella Wilfer, "This is to certify that Miss —— can cook, though a college girl!"

That was indeed a happy day for Bella. And there came another day that was an equally happy one for the whole family. That was when they all bent over the table to read, all at once, this letter from Professor Tyler:

My Dear Miss Wickham: It gives me sincere pleasure to be able to write you that your Greek recitations have improved to so

marked a degree that you need have no further fear of a condition at the close of the term.

"Oh, it is such a relief! such a *big* relief!" said "Bella," now crying in good earnest. "You've not the slightest idea, really! But how can I ever thank you, dear Boffins?"

"You have really *Noddy* to thank," said Mrs. Boffin, generously, "for she was the one to think of fetching you up here. Of course, it's more fun doing things together, but I never thought of your pegging along alone, off there with your two haughty seniors! And now, I don't see how we got on before, with our family so incomplete!"

The other girls wondered for "nine days" how those Boffins happened to pick up that little outsider that nobody knew. But as they *did* know her, she became very popular, and it was quite forgotten that she was an "outsider."

And *none* of them ever knew how very near she came to being conditioned in Greek!

CHAPTER XIX

WILL CHITTENDEN AGAIN

'Tis an old tale and often told.

—*Marmion.*

FIVE or six days before the spring vacation Ruth received two rather startling letters from home. One was from her mother and one from "Aunt Bonnie Ray."

Aunt Bonnie wrote:

My Dear Niece: You know I have always stuck to it that two and two make four, and that they will always continue to do so. But a certain two and two that I have lately put together seem to show that one and one are about to make one!—an equally undeniable sum of arithmetic.

"In the spring the young man's fancy," you know. You know we have all of us suspected, since the Christmas vacation, that Will is very much in love with your Nathalie Page. And we are all very anxious for it to come off. I know Will is most

influenced by *indirect* remarks, so I say nothing of Nathalie, but take occasion now and then to comment on the fine patrician faces and manners to be found in Virginia, or on the good taste our Ruth has shown in her choice of friends at college.

Many mickles make a muckle, and as I say, I have put some twos together and produced fours. But the last pair of twos is quite convincing.

First, Will has sudden business in Richmond, Virginia; second, the nature of which he keeps to himself—that's one two.

Again, on his desk, as I happened to run into his room to measure his bureau for a cover I'm making, I saw one of his architectural "plans." I thought nothing of it, and carelessly cast my eye over it, supposing it to be the design for a house of some unknown person, when—lo! I noticed a little note to one side, *Rathbone Place*, and around the corner, *Front—Merlin Street.* Now that, as you know, is the corner the boy owns himself.

Inquiry: What is the resulting four?

I've pieced it out, as no doubt you have done by this time, little girl! He has run down to Virginia to see Nathalie's people—they live not far from Richmond, I think?—and to gain her mother's consent to his putting a certain question to her. And the plans are the plans for the house. Which looks like something immediate.

Humanum est errare, but I think I'm right this time.

Your sentimental aunt,

BONNIBEL C. RAY.

The other letter was as follows:

MY PRECIOUS DAUGHTER: Will has just told me something which he desired me to write to you at once. You know how much taken with Nathalie he has been. He is now anxious to persuade her to marry him at once, and to settle down in a house to be built this spring on his Merlin Street lot.

Of course, with this on his mind, he couldn't bear to have her come here for the spring vacation, as we first planned. He says he couldn't keep from saying something to her which might make her uncomfortable—which, naturally, would never do. So he is to try to gain her mother's consent to his pleas. You know our Will could take any mother by storm, with his dear "ways," and the truth and goodness that shows out in every inch of him. Then he hopes Mrs. Page will manage to have Nathalie spend the two weeks in Virginia, and he will then appear on the scene and try his fate.

It seems too bad for Nathalie to have only the one year of college, but that is certainly Will's idea now, and he is a persistent youth.

So don't oppose any objections to Nathalie's going home instead of coming here. That is Will's plea to you. But, of course, don't tell her anything she doesn't know—about Will's being in Virginia and all that!

Ruth pondered long and amazedly over these letters, as even that which we expect is so often the greatest surprise.

And Nathalie was not less astonished when *she* had a letter—from her uncle in New York, saying that he knew she must be getting homesick, and enclosing a check for her traveling expenses to Virginia.

For the remaining two or three days of the term poor Nathalie was in a strange mood. It was a wonder that she ever got safely through her examinations. The thoughts, tumbling around in disorder in her muddled little brain, yet seemed to have orbits of their own, for —morning, noon and night—they recurred in due order. "Of course, I am wild to go home. How little I thought I should see that precious mother again

before June! And what *ages* it seems since I saw her! And my dear old Sunnylawn! I miss the very grass. And *yet!* I *would* like to go to Homewood. I seem to be as homesick for one place as for the other. And what does *that* mean, Nathalie Page? Ha! ha! Now you *are* caught!"

But when she reached Sunnylawn, in the lovely spring evening, her mother welcomed her with so great a tenderness that she felt heartily ashamed of her wavering feelings.

"My precious girl," Mrs. Page said in her soft, musical tones like Nathalie's, and the four little brothers and sisters crowded around to get the first look at their big sister who had been away for "years and years." "Oh, it is *so* good to have my sunbeam here again!"

"And it *is* good to be here," said Nathalie, with equal joy—and for one blessed moment her old undivided mind returned. "Oh, *Virginia!* Look at the grass and the violets; and, dear mother,

the snow is hardly gone up there. Ah, but this is *home!* And, mother, there's nobody in this big world like *you!*" and she clung to her, covering her face and hair with soft, light kisses.

And then they sat down to supper, with the little children bubbling with glee over the home-made ice cream and the dainty chocolate lady-fingers, Nathalie's favorite cakes.

After supper was over, and the children had been put to bed by their old mammy, with "Sister" helping and tucking them all in, Nathalie and her mother sat out on the piazza for a long, quiet talk. The air was mild, and the feeling of the spring was in it. The lawn, sloping down to the quiet river, was already green, and the river held its course with a placid face, quite unaware of the two throbbing hearts so near!

Nathalie longed to tell her mother, for there had never been any reticence between them; while her mother, not knowing whether or not there was any suspi-

cion in Nathalie's heart of Mr. Chittenden's love, or any love for him, hardly knew how to open the subject.

And so for some time they talked idly of the county people and the changes among them, of the crops that were being arranged for on the place, of the merits of the overseer and the laziness of the workers; then, of college friends and college doings, till at last Nathalie broke in abruptly.

"You know, mother, love, that I was to go to Homewood again this spring, but when Uncle Ted's letter came I changed my mind."

"You enjoyed the holidays there, didn't you, dearie?" said Mrs. Page conciously.

Nathalie blushed, and found herself suddenly unable to go on.

"And what would you think if I should say that some one from Homewood is here? Would you be glad, daughter?"

"*Here*—in Virginia?"

"Down at the inn this minute. And

he is coming out to see my little girl in the morning."

"Oh, mama, mama!" cried Nathalie, with a choke in her voice, while she buried her head in that lap that had been so long her childhood's and girlhood's refuge.

"Do you *want* him to come?" asked her mother, with the same sort of tenderness in her tone that the girl remembered when she had brought to "mama" a burnt finger or a bruised nose or a "sum" she could not "do." "If you don't want to see him, mother will tell him, darling. And if you *do* want to see him, mother will be, oh, so very glad—even though Boston seems far away. Mother never cared so much for her little girl to have the college education. She has old-fashioned notions, and would far rather that she had her own home, even if it must be in the North."

"Go on, mama!" pleaded Nathalie, without lifting her head. "You would like it? And you *do* like him? You

couldn't help that, could you, mama, love—from the very first? How many times have you seen him? Where did he come from? When did he get here?"

"He has been here only a few days—yet long enough, dear child, to win my full favor. He came to rob me of my eldest child, yet he has spoken in so unselfish a way, with such thought for my love of her and such humility about trying to win her, that I yielded everything. But he is not sure of *you* yet, little witch!"

Nathalie raised her eyes, and they sparkled wonderfully through the wetness of them, and her mother was satisfied.

"And do you want to see him to-night?" she asked a little anxiously, as the girl jumped up and threw her arms about her mother's neck. But she was relieved when the answer came: "Oh no; not to-night. We must get used to the idea first, mustn't we?"

Then Mrs. Page went off to send a message to Will, telling him that he might call in the morning, and Nathalie

sat dreamily gazing off—at the colored boy riding down the path with the message, at the moonlight now coming over the river, and on, on, beyond them all, into the future and her own life.

When she went to bed very late that night, with her mother's kisses on her forehead, the love of a mother seemed so beautiful to her; she had never felt its strong unselfishness before. She could not sleep for the joy and wonderment that had come over all her life. She could not bear to go to sleep, and lose the consciousness of it all.

So she lay awake, wondering how he would look when she met him in the morning, and whether he would call her Nathalie right away. At last she got herself into the state of almost dreading his coming, and wishing the first were over—it would be so strange.

But it was wonderful how easy he made it for her. He spoke so quietly, as if she had always been close to him, and yet he looked upon her thoughts and

feelings with so grave a respect that she felt herself capable of everything high and noble. For she could not disappoint him, and she felt as if these deep and unselfish views of life and duty had always been her own, too.

"Ruth will feel badly over my giving up college, though!" she said falteringly.

"But we'll only be having our commencement a little sooner," answered Will. "There's plenty of education ahead for us, dear, especially in the next year or two. When two people make up their minds to walk hand in hand through all the first difficulties of getting a footing in life, and all on a very limited income, there are plenty of lessons. They're hard ones, too, they say, but we'll have a good courage. And you will be queen of a little home very soon."

"And you will be king. And what shall we call it? We must have a name."

"It should be the Palace, then!" said Will. "And here we are, as silly as they say they always are!"

That two weeks "vacation" passed all too quickly. Will and Nathalie studied over plans for the house, and changed and revised and asked every one's opinion, and took nobody's advice, till the plans were settled enough to begin the actual digging. For a name, they decided on *The Cedars*, from a clump of cedars in one corner of the ground.

Then it was arranged for Mrs. Page to go up to Northampton with Nathalie and take a look at the Bower, and then on to Boston with Will to see Homewood and be welcomed by the whole family.

CHAPTER XX

THE SPRING TERM

The April winds are magical
And thrill our tuneful frames.
—*Emerson.*

SITTING alone in the Bower, Ruth looked forward with a strange feeling to welcoming the trio from Virginia. She had never known the face of jealousy, and she wondered if this could be that dread of every fine but sensitive nature. She could see now what it might mean to be jealous of Will's and Nathalie's absorption in each other; and seeing what the feeling would be, she scorned it as contemptible.

She had always had Will so much to herself. They had been brought up together, and he had always seemed to *belong* to Ruth and her mother—there at home. And here were Nathalie and *her*

mother coming to Northampton with him, and he belonged to *them!*

So she sat in the Bower, thinking it all over, when—to her astonishment—Will's card was brought up to her, with a little penciled note: "Can you drive with me for about twenty minutes? Then we will pick up the others at the hotel. Come down with your hat on."

It was so like him to know just what she was feeling, and to make the chance for a cozy little talk. He lifted her up to the front seat of the surrey in his strong, protecting way, and made her feel from the first that she had lost nothing of him.

"I've not had the time to see you till now, Ruth, since Nathalie and I made up our minds. Now, I want to thank you, dear, for being the giver of such happiness to me. You brought me my treasure. Of course, you'll not think me good enough for her, but I'll take care of her in the world with all my heart and strength."

He spoke gratefully, almost pleadingly, and Ruth felt her crooked thoughts "straightened out" in an instant. The appeal for her sympathy changed everything, and from that hour she never again felt that pang of jealousy over these two.

"Indeed, I think you are worthy of her, Will," she said, with great heartiness and affection; "and I'm so glad, *so glad!*"

Then she talked of Nathalie and her sweetness and her beauty and her never-failing sunny ways. And Will said little, but listened, with a thirst to know of the life which was now his, and yet of whose past, in fact and detail, he knew so little.

"But it is four o'clock!" He drew himself up hastily and turned the horses.

They found Mrs. Page and Nathalie waiting for them, Nathalie looking more like a flower than ever in the daintiest daffodil cashmere gown with myrtle-green hat and slashed jacket and pale yellow gloves of undressed kid.

But Ruth was no longer in the mood to be envious. She never thought of her

own rather shabby and wintry dress of navy blue or of her last year's hat, but joined in the general rapture. One would really have found it hard to be depressing, with Will and Nathalie so openly joyous, and Mrs. Page so warmly delighting in her beloved daughter's delight.

They drove for two hours through the beautiful Connecticut River valley, with changing glimpses of the river and of the hills with all the charm of flying cloud-shadows upon them. Then they had to go "home"—which for Nathalie now meant the Bower and lessons; but the Boffins arranged to meet Mrs. Page and Will in the morning.

Fran had just come, having spent her two weeks vacation with a girl that lived in Easthampton, and she had to be told the great news. Between the hugging of Our Mutual Friend and the cautioning not "to tell," and the decorating of the Bower with festoons of very dusty clematis in honor of the tidings, there was not so much studying as there might have

been. But, as Fran remarked, "*This* doesn't happen even *once* a year, and must be done handsomely!"

Very late, in fact almost ten o'clock, "Bella Wilfer" came in, and *she* had to be told, and all the hugging and laughing and rejoicing to be done over again. By that time it was quite too late for Bella to go home, and Ruth suggested begging "Mother Hubbard" to let her stay, as one of them could sleep on the Trojan Horse.

It had been planned that Mrs. Page should call on "Mother Hubbard" and tell her the news; but when that smiling matron was found to be up on the third floor, welcoming the girls as they came in on the late trains, she, too, had to be dragged into the Bower, and the tale told and hugged over and joked about.

But that was positively as far as it went for two or three weeks, and the Boffins did their best to put their minds once more into harness.

When Mrs. Page and Will were gone,

this was a little easier; but still the excitement of the daily letters that Nathalie received, her haste to reach the box first after each post, Fran's schemes to reach it sooner and have the exquisite delight of refusing to part with the letters until bought with some ingeniously contrived forfeit—all these things made it harder to attend to duty.

For one thing, the "Memorabil" Book required so much attention nowadays. Fran, having had a kodak sent to her, took tiny pictures of "O. M. F." at unexpected times, mounted these in the Book, and labeled them "*Reverie*," "*Writing to Him*," "*Not Prepared*," (in the next day's recitation), "*Taking Out the Post*."

Then there were stolen "bits of his handwriting" pasted in, and one sketch done "from memory" by Fran, "The Only Genuine *Mister* Boffin, *or The Man of the House*."

Besides these were sketches "from fancy," of the *House* (whose actual prog-

ress and growth were daily reported in Nathalie's letters).

Of all the Boffins, Our Mutual Friend was the least fond of being the center of attention, or—as Fran called it—"The Cynosure of All Eyes;" and it frightened and worried her a little. But with those daily letters, nothing managed to frighten and worry her very much, and she only stayed more in her own little room, with the key turned upon her tormenters.

One day, about the end of April, the two seniors with whom Bella Wilfer lived went away for the day and night, and all the Boffins went down to "keep house" together.

Fran insisted upon taking the rôle of Mr. Chittenden, and giving Nathalie some practice in being Lady of the House. The other girls promptly fell in with this plan and pretended to be guests of Will's, come especially to see his wife. They all treated her with exaggerated affection, except Bella, who pretended to criticise her severely. She "preferred dark

women." Nathalie seemed "so young and frivolous," but "there was no accounting for tastes, and she might improve."

Fran sat calmly at the head of the table, after making Nathalie "stop giggling" and do all the cooking—and made remarks: "The potatoes are a little raw, my love, but under your smiles they soften;" "This corn-bread is not what my mother used to make,"—until Our Mutual Friend could not eat at all, and after the others were done she was obliged to be left alone with the viands—to which she then did justice.

And, oh, how Bella Wilfer did wish that the daily grind of housework might always be turned into fun by the laughing Boffins! But the more serious and far less capable seniors returned, and the Boffins again sought the Bower.

CHAPTER XXI

UNDER THE APPLE TREES

The infinite galleries of the Past await but one brief process and all their pictures will be called out and fixed forever.—*Holmes.*

THE whole Boffin family, Ruth and Fran and Nathalie and Bella Wilfer, were sitting out back of the Hubbard, where Fran had swung a hammock under the trees. From the exquisite blossoms above them there floated down upon the group the pervasive sweetness of the odor, and now and then a petal of pink and white.

"Doesn't this make you feel like dropping into poetry, Bella?" asked "O. M. F.," looking contentedly up toward the white clouds in the pale blue sky; "everything blue and white and pink!"

"I'm no Silas Wegg," said Bella, "but those clouds do seem to—

float aloft o'er vales and hills.

don't they? It puts me into a retrospective mood. Girls, wouldn't you like to hear about my farm life? You really don't know anything about my past, you know!"

"Oh, do!" said Mrs. Boffin. "Have you really got a Cherub for a Pa, and a Majestic Ma? I have never heard you speak of your home, but I hope it is *not* all that Dickens describes!"

"I haven't any home, or 'pa' or 'ma,'" said Bella, gravely. "I have had no home since I was ten years old, the year my mother—who had been long a widow—died."

"Oh, do go on," Mrs. Boffin said again, as Bella paused, and Our Mutual Friend murmured, sympathetically, "How dreadful, dearie!"

"It's *story* enough—my life!—without having anything very heroic in it, either, that's the trouble!"

The girls sat listening, and Bella talked on, quite enjoying the new sense of opening her heart to sympathy.

"Father was a sort of musical genius, they say—an organist in New York, and, between a church salary and what he got from pupils, had a fair income. But he never saved anything, and my sister and I have not a relative on either his side or mother's, near enough to 'count.' So, at mother's death, we were pretty near the poorhouse—more literally than any of you can possibly understand.

"My sister, three years older than I, was thirteen when mother died. We had moved into a tiny New Jersey village, eight miles from the railroad—Berryville is the name of it—and all the farmers' wives had been very kind to mother.

"She was musical, too, and she earned some money, by giving piano lessons to the young girls on the farms around there —some of them paid in butter and peaches and things like that!

"When we two children were left alone, one of the farmers' wives offered to take us as 'help' to wash dishes and sweep and run errands, and, in the summer, to

pick the vegetables and wait on the summer-boarders. My, but she worked us hard! But we were tough little creatures, and got plenty to eat — things cooked with cream and all that, as they do on an old-fashioned farm; so we thrived. But, girls, if you know anything about such things, you know that 'all the strawberries and cream you want' are quite *earned* by the time you've picked berries for fifteen people and milked five or six cows.

"There was a little district school in the place, where we went in the winter-time and learned the three R's. Most years the teachers were not very good, but one year, a very bright Columbia Law School graduate came down from New York for his health. He decided to take that school after he had spent the summer at our farm. And he made a new thing of it! In June, when the year was over, he married my sister, who was seventeen.

"And, to cut the tale short, it is to my beloved brother-in-law that I owe my

coming to college. I shall try to pay him back when I get through. He is now in his father's law-office in New York, and can really 'afford' *me!* And yet you can see why I am so extremely anxious to keep my expenses down. And"—she finished with some excitement—"the immediate reason I dwell on this at such length is that he is now insisting on my living on the grounds next year. He has been writing to the dear old Prex, and it has been arranged all of a sudden that I take Nathalie's room next year!"

Almost as much delight was produced in the Boffin breasts by this news as by that of Nathalie's engagement. "You darling Bella!" cried "O. M. F."; and Fran sat up and waved the hat — which she had been idly swinging as she lounged in the hammock—high above her head, as she gave vent to three ringing cheers.

Ruth, of all the girls, had been the most deeply touched by Mary's story, and she put her arms affectionately

around her, saying, with tears in her eyes, "What an old trump you are!"

Just then one of the class pin committee came meandering across the grass.

"The pins have come, girls!" she cried out, holding up three little packages. "I'm just distributing them." Ruth, Fran and Nathalie each had one, but Mary had not been able to send for one.

"Oh, it's a shame, Bella!" said Nathalie, softly.

"But," "Bella" answered, "you see, dearest, I've been so used to doing without things of greater consequence that class pins never even enter my imagination. So I don't miss them."

The pin was really a beauty, and the girls were so much occupied in looking at it that they did not notice, till close upon them, a group of strangers, led by —Will Chittenden!

"Oh, where *did* you come from?" said Ruth, while Nathalie actually turned pale.

"You need not tremble," said Will, going to her at once, and taking her hand; "there's nothing the matter. But our English cousins who live in Auckland, New Zealand, landed in New York the other day; and I proposed to bring them up here to see an American woman's college—and *you*," he finished, in a low aside. "You will think you are marrying an extensive family, from here to New Zealand!" Then he introduced Nathalie to the three ladies and two men, who, being all exceptionally tall, made a formidable array.

Nathalie, with her sunny hair blown loose by the breeze, and her cheeks pink as the apple blossoms above her, looked like the Dryad of the blooming apple tree. Will felt very proud of her, and the "cousins" were charmed.

"I suppose you thought New Zealanders were all Maoris!" said Cousin Jack, smiling down upon the Boffins. "But there's a handful of us out there that boast Caucasian blood and keep the

Queen's birthday, bless her! Will, you'll have to run over for your bridal trip. We're just having your 'fall' there now, and June will be the early winter, with its marvelous bright, mild days. It's the most perfect climate on earth, you know — the North Island. Auckland, Miss Page, is just about as far from the equator as your Richmond is, and we've the ocean all around to moderate both heat and cold."

Then Ruth introduced the party to "Mother Hubbard," and they had just time for some tea on the piazza before taking the train again.

CHAPTER XXII

THE AMHERST DRAMATICS

Last night, above the whistling wind,
I heard the merry rain,—
A fusillade upon the roof,
A tattoo on the pane.

—*Bret Harte.*

SOME of the Hubbard girls were reading "The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains" together, in what they called the Sunset Club, after tea; Ruth and Fran belonged to the club, but Nathalie took the time to write her daily letter.

One evening, as Mr. and Mrs. Boffin mounted the stairs to the Bower after the reading, they heard a piercing shriek from No. 32. They were, of course, really frightened, and rushed madly down the hall, only to find Nathalie gasping out incomprehensible remarks over a

pool of water on the floor (fortunately, on the oilcloth mat) while in one hand she held the empty water-pitcher.

"What *is* the matter?" said Fran, with a reaction of wrath. "What are you terrifying your whole family over? And *what*"—she suddenly fixed her eye upon the oilcloth, which Ruth was preparing to "wipe up,"—"what is *that* creature, to be the cause of these alarms?"

"It's—a—*June bug!*" faltered Our Mutual Friend. "I'm dreadfully afraid of them."

"So I should judge from this exhibition," said Fran, but her sternness melted into a good laugh, when she looked again at Nathalie. She had sunk into a chair at the farthest end of the room (which was not far, for the room was small) and was begging Ruth to "throw out of the window" the struggling, wet bug, which with its legs in the air, was working them violently to get its body back to their support.

"What were you trying to do?" asked

Ruth gently, picking up the bug on the end of a visiting-card (which happened to be Mr. Chittenden's), and throwing it out of the window as requested.

"I was—*drowning* it!" answered Our Mutual Friend.

"It would have been wiser to put the June bug into the washbowl," remarked Mrs. Boffin, critically, "or out in the heavy rain that's falling, than to pour water on the floor for him to crawl out of! However, girls, I've something more vital than all this to talk about. Let's go to the Bower."

"You remember," she went on, when they were comfortably settled, the lamp lighted, and the screens carefully pulled down against the June bug's return—"you remember my Amherst cousin I told you about — the 'spring chicken?' They say he has improved wonderfully. One of the girls that went from here over to the ball game last week met him, and she denies that he has any freckles. So he *must* be changed! Well, to come

to the point, I've just had a note from him. Listen:

MY DEAR FRANNY: I've been waiting patiently for an invitation to call on you. I want tremendously to see you and Smith. Now I'm not waiting any longer (not being built on the plan of Fabius Cunctator!)—so here goes.

Our seniors give their Dramatics next Friday night. I've heard of a number of Smithers that are to favor us with their presence.

Now, you perhaps know that I live with my Aunt Melia. She doesn't happen to be your aunt, but she'll serve for one on this occasion, "with great pleasure," she says, and she sends the message that if you and one or two of your chums will come over, she will make you comfortable here at the house as long as you care to stop, and she will go over with me and the hack to obtain you.

It's a big room and I should think three of you girls could come. As to the hack, I'll get a big one, so we can squeeze in, or I can go on top.

It's rather late in the day to ask you. I can only hope you've not been snapped up. Not seeing you at the ball game, I have been led to build on your not having other friends here.

If I don't hear from you to the contrary, you may expect to see me, Aunt Melia, *and* the coach, sharp at five, Friday afternoon. That will give us time for supper here. I have five tickets, and shall be obliged to squander the extra ones on the fellows if you disappoint me. The more, the merrier. I mean to be an out-and-out belle while I'm doing this, and surprise the chappies.

Hopefully your cousin,
HAL MERWIN.

"Now, I propose we all four go," said Fran. "Bella mustn't be left out. We can make Hal stand up at the Dramatics, if he can't get another ticket."

"We'll have to ask President Seelye's permission" suggested Nathalie; "but of course he'll let us go."

"If it will *only* stop raining!"

The next morning (Thursday) it rained on without "letting up" for a minute—a sort of "*crescendo, accelerando, con forza*" effect, Nathalie called it, but unfortunately no "*finale.*"

Friday morning the girls awoke to find it—still raining!

"*Will* he come?"

"He *will* come—he *won't* come. It's as bad as counting daisy petals,—'he loves me, he loves me not!'" said Fran, pretty crossly, when Bella came to the Bower after dinner, ready to go or not to go.

"He'd have to love you pretty *hard* for this!" said Bella. "Any one whose spirits wouldn't be dampened by this atmosphere!"

And then, as the four girls sat impatiently watching the clouds, the Hubbard door-bell began to ring and the "grinning Cheshire of a maid" to appear at the door with telegrams and special-delivery letters in close succession, to which Fran sent a variety of answers. It was maddening.

"Oh, why did I ever suppose a spring chicken would have the courage to go out in the wet!" said Fran, with a tremendous sigh.

"Now, Mrs. Boffin," Nathalie would argue, "you know that's not fair. You know you've sent him the most inconsis-

tent messages, and perhaps his aunt doesn't care to get soaked for our delight. You know Mother Hubbard said we couldn't go unless his aunt came over."

"Oh, people that have the interests of Harvard at heart are not supposed to care to go over to Amherst!" said Fran, with needless sarcasm. "You don't care much about going, that's all."

"I *don't* think it's safe to go driving in a leaky hack a night like this," said Nathalie, with spirit.

"And I'm really afraid to try to get through the Hadley meadows. You heard them telling at dinner how flooded the roads are; water up to the hubs of the wheels!" said Ruth.

And then the tea-bell rang, and the girls were startled to see that it was really six o'clock.

"You all can go down," said Fran; "Bella, you go to tea in my place. I know he'll come, and I shall go, if I go alone!"

"I mean to go," said Bella; "he may have been delayed by driving slowly through the river, and I've no doubt he will come. But, meantime, there's no harm in eating one's supper."

But Fran would not go down, and would not touch the lady-finger that Nathalie brought up in her pocket!

Then the door-bell rang again.

"Another telegram, I surmise!" said Fran. "'*Shall* I come?' By *no* means, sir!"

But it was a bit of pasteboard—

"*Mr. Henry Merwin.*"

Down rushed Fran to the drawing-room.

"We can't go without your aunt," she remarked without preface.

"She's out in the carriage," responded Hal, with equal abruptness. "Hurry!"

There was little time for argument or persuasion. Ruth and Nathalie thought it "very foolish to go," though "too bad to have let Hal and his aunt come over." But Fran and "Bella Wilfer" hurried

into their wraps, Bella covered by Ruth's rain-coat, and within five minutes the two were with the others in the dripping hack.

Dark it was, as a "pocket," starless overhead, wet in every direction. But all four were in hilarious spirits; Aunt Melia said the frolic made her ten years younger. The unhappy one was the hackman, but Hal had given him an extra dollar "to get them there in time," and they swung merrily along, with creakings and swervings and plungings, across the Connecticut, over the flooded meadows, and into the little college town and "Aunt Melia's" welcome abode. Hal gave them five minutes to eat, and they ate!—Bella as if she had not "just had one supper."

Then they drove again, in the dripping hack, the few blocks to the hall where the Dramatics were given. "I suppose this is the way that June bug felt after Nathalie's deluge," said Fran, as they dismounted; she had just told the others the tale.

The play was original with one of the Amherst seniors, and it was very funny from beginning to end.

It was a mock-heroic, based on Pope's Rape of the Lock, and cleverly brought up to date by the theft of a necktie on the lady's part from the irate hero, "to go with her shirt-waist."

"Do you think it has paid?" asked Aunt Melia, as the girls again reached the house in safety, and sat gowned in two warm wrappers before an open fire in their bedroom. (For what girls ever go right to bed at midnight?)

"Oh, I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" said Bella, gratefully. "I don't believe I shall ever have such a good time again!"

But when they did finally go to sleep, it was still to the tune of the rain; and when they woke, late in the morning, it was to the same unending music. "What ever can we do?" they groaned, and looked out at the flooded roads. It was worse than before.

In a slight lull of the storm the girls crawled out with Hal to see his "society" house, feeling—as Fran explained—"like angle worms creeping out on the wet sidewalks."

Afternoon came, and more rain.

"We simply *must* get home," said Fran with sudden decision. "We promised the president. It wouldn't do to stop here over Sunday. It might be repeated against the college, and would sound *freaky*, don't you know?"

So Hal went forth to bribe another hackman. The one they had had utterly refused to repeat the trip at any price.

The afternoon had closed in, almost dark as night, by the time Hal had succeeded and Aunt Melia had self-sacrificingly stepped once more into a hack. Aunt Melia and Hal would have to stop in Northampton over Sunday!

"If we ever get there!"

When they reached the Hadley meadows, the hackman grew more and more wroth in his expressions, which were

funny makeshifts, as Hal had promised him his extra pay only on condition of his not swearing before the ladies!

"Here," said Fran, opening the box of candy she was taking home. "We might as well eat this while we're sure of our lives!"

Picking out flavors diverted their attention a little, but it was very tedious going at a snail's pace, and stopping altogether for ten minutes at a time, when the horses seemed unable to go a step farther. Glad enough they were, horses and hackman and "fares," when they again got safely over the bridge, and on the main street of Northampton.

The Hubbard House gladly welcomed "Aunt Melia" for "over Sunday," but Hal was banished to the hotel.

Fran made this all up to him, though, by inviting him to *her* senior Dramatics and securing for him the best seat to be had. But that was three years later!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

And that old common arbitrator, Time,
Will one day end it.

—*Shakespeare.*

TOWARD the end of the year it was the custom for each of the undergraduate classes to entertain the graduating class, with a reception or glee club concert or something of the sort. The Boffins were very anxious that their class should think of something original, that might be at the same time simple and unique.

At last Fran thought of a plan that met with unanimous approval in the class meeting. It was a walk.

One lovely May morning, about three weeks before commencement, just at the hour when the seniors were going down to

breakfast, each one was met by a freshman and asked to take a little walk instead. With much laughing on both sides and amazement on the part of the seniors, the escorts then led their guests off down the road to the nearest woods, where they found the dearest little bouquets of wild flowers already tied with violet and white ribbons, "growing" in convenient nooks.

Then the whole party gathered at the edge of the woods, where a broad, grassy place had been found, and tables set for a breakfast.

So much had been said by the president about the wrong of levying large taxes on the girls for this sort of thing, that the Boffins had been determined to show how much fun could be got out of a very inexpensive treat. And they had carried the day with the class. But the seniors said they had never tasted anything better than the dainty, thin slices of bread and butter, the big, ripe strawberries, served with their stems on and with

inverted cones of powdered sugar, and the fragrant coffee, made in picnic style by Fran and Mary Gooding and "Bella Wilfer."

They had just time to saunter back to the college in time for chapel, and it would be hard to tell which looked happier, the seniors with their tiny bouquets, or the freshmen with their smiles of triumph over the appreciation of their plan shown by the haughty guests.

Even Mary Gooding, who had laughed at Fran's anxiety about the president's request, and had set her down as a "confirmed goody-good," now admitted that the simple *menu* had been a success, and far more appropriate to the occasion than her suggestion of caviare sandwiches and ginger-ale.

All the senior festivities were crowding together as the close of the term approached. The freshmen watched them, when they were on the ground, with as much pleasure as the participants.

The president's reception was the most

exciting of all. Awnings had been put up from the president's "cottage" down the walks to the other "houses," and flitting to and fro, seen by the light of the rows of Japanese lanterns, were figures in pale blues and pinks and grays, with now and then a black dress coat for variety.

"Ah!" said Fran, with her head far out of the window. "Girls, just *fahncy?* All of us but Nathalie, watching that same scene, flags and lanterns and things, next year and the next, and then doing it *ourselves!* I can imagine the seniors chanting to themselves—or, no, it is the voice of the night breeze that I hear—

Oh, say, can you see by the moon's pearly light,
What so proudly you've hailed at each graduation?
Yon broad stripes and bright stars
In the cool, shady night,
Floating in a triumph of senior elation;
While up the broad street
Come the hurrying feet
Of out-of-town men for this mild dissipation?

"Oh, how *can* you do that sort of thing so fast?" said Nathalie, in an admiring tone.

"It's just a habit," said Fran. "I have formed it, and now I can't shake it off. And the moral of that is——"

"If you *could* stop improvising and quoting long enough to let me get my mind on that superb gown going out the Washburn walk. It's Miss Jewell! And there goes little Bella Watson! She's nothing less than an omen when she appears in that black thing—like a thundercloud coming up in the West!"

"Don't make fun of my namesake, Miss Gooding!" said "Bella Wilfer," half-seriously. "For my own clothes are so far from being above criticism that I really feel sensitive about other people's!"

"Well, all you Boffins and Mary Gooding, too," remarked Nathalie, "if we don't settle to our conic sections to-night how are we ever to get through the exam? There's nothing like those theorems for simply sliding out of my head; your heads may be more trustworthy. Ruth always seems to remember them."

"I'm rather sorry marks are not known here," said Fran. "Just out of curiosity, I'd like to know if any girl in our class has stood so high as our Ruth this year—I mean, in all the things taken together."

"I think she has been the best," said Nathalie; and "I'm sure of it," said Bella, in a breath.

"Why, girls, I truly never thought of such a thing!" Ruth looked as surprised as only *her* face could look—all her expressions were so genuine and unaffected. But she showed also a genuine pleasure. She had felt so much less "important" this year than ever before in her life; Fran was so much quicker and Nathalie had become the center of attention even in Ruth's own home letters.

"Of course, there are a number of the girls that would run pretty close," said Fran with her usual decision. "But I think Ruth would come out ahead, even of Miss Graham, for Ruth is better in mathematics and a steadier worker. If

we were to pick out the first ten in the class, though, there's not one of the other Boffins that would come in at all!"

"You're right," echoed the others.

Then Mary Gooding, not being inclined to study, went home, and the Boffins put a "Busy" sign on the door and settled down to their parabolas and hyperbolas.

It was pretty hard for Our Mutual Friend to put her mind on these things, now that the time for the wedding came nearer and nearer. But her mother had wisely decided that none of her gowns should be even begun until the term was over; and so one cause of distraction was removed. The house was, of course, growing every day, but Will wrote very little now about its progress. His letters became amusingly confined to questions about the college work, how she was doing with her reviews and in what order the examinations came. And so the girl pegged along pretty faithfully.

But the next morning after the Boffin

attack upon the conic sections, she had a very funny dream to tell!

"I seemed," she said, "to be standing at one end of a parabola, while Will was on the focus. Along the directrix came innumerable tiny question marks, straight at me, which—if I could guess their questions and answer them before they reached my end of the line—would simply run off harmlessly along the outside curves and vanish. But if I failed, they would sit on Will's head! And he was getting into dreadful danger of being crushed, I assure you, before I woke up."

"That's what I call having conic sections on the brain!" said Fran, laughing; "and I advise you to put them safely on your examination paper, where they'll be quite harmless!"

"And it's to be done in about five minutes now," said Ruth, hurrying off toward the college building, while Nathalie and Fran snatched up their tennis caps and followed.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SERENADE

In notes by distance made more sweet.
—*Collins.*

THE last night that the freshmen stayed at Northampton they were collected in a body for a sort of farewell —which was, happily, not so final as that the seniors were saying.

About eighty of them had been sitting around on the Hubbard piazzas and in the drawing-rooms, singing college songs, when Frances suggested that they should go and "serenade somebody." She had just received from her father the assurance that she could finish her college course, and so she was in a singing mood.

Who should be the happy *serenadee!* No one could be agreed upon, till the Greek professor was suggested, and there

was unanimous applause. He had just moved into his new house on Round Hill, and this would be a novel sort of house-warming.

Accordingly the girls swarmed up the street—as there was no moon, the few passers-by were very much alarmed by the extent of the unseen columns as they advanced out of the night. It had been agreed that Fran Townsend, being the best *improvisatrice*, should strike up the solo as the words came to her, and then that the girls should repeat the words in chorus.

"Take a tune we all know," said one of the best singers, who pressed close to Fran, "and tell us which it is as soon as you decide. And be sure to sing the words clearly!"

"Here, Nathalie!" said Fran; "you come next to me, and lead the chorus." And the two courageously led on, in an awful silence enforced by two self-appointed monitors, up the winding path, till they stood right before the house.

Then at a signal, they all began together, very softly:

Farewell, professor,
Farewell, farewell to thee.

until the professor was seen to come to the window, pull up the shade, and stand at the open window with his wife.

Then Fran sang, to the tune of "My Name is Nora"—

Professor Tyler's
As sweet as Huyler's!
We all adore him, 'tis safe to say.
To Greece he's led us,
With Greek he's fed us,
And we hate to say good-bye to him to-day!

and the class took it up, to the tune of the chorus—

Professor Tyler's
As good as Huyler's!
We all adore him, 'tis safe to sa-*ay!*
To Greece he 's led us,
With Greek he 's fed us!
And we *hate*
To say good-*bye*
To him to-day!

Then Fran again:

We 've sailed with Homer,
And that old roamer—

The sly Odysseus — his journey o'er,
And then with Xenny,
We 've studied many
Of the wise old saws of Socrates galore.
Chorus: Professor Tyler's, etc.

And then, as the professor came out on the piazza, the girls gave "Three cheers for Socrates!" and the professor said gravely:

"For which Socrates returns many, many thanks," and added, as Mrs. Tyler stepped out: "In which his faithful wife Xantippe joins."

* * * *

"Didn't you think the dear man was a good deal touched?" asked Nathalie, as she and Fran led the procession back down the winding path. "I thought there was a little tremble in his voice!"

"It was natural that there should be a tremble in his voice," replied Fran, coolly; "any man would have a tremble in his voice that had just invited nearly a hundred young women to come in, and had no way of being sure they would not accept!"

"Now don't be cynical, Mrs. Boffin," pleaded Nathalie. "But think of another verse to sing for the Prexie"—they were just nearing the president's house, as they entered the grounds again.

"Well!" said Fran, halting abruptly; and then she began to sing, while the girls listened to catch the words:

Mid pleasures and colleges though we may roam,
Be it never so humble, there's no place like home!
And so, though a year full of profit we've spent,
We now to our homes go without discontent.

And President Seelye, who was sitting on the piazza, laughed with the girls, and joined in the unanimous chorus:

Home! Home! Sweet, sweet home!
There 's no place like home!
There 's no place like home!

And then the girls all managed a final "Good night, ladies!" and the class of "'8—" met no more as "freshmen."

"Oh, dear, I feel all the pangs of homesickness over again," said Fran, as the Boffins went up to the Bower, with its unhomelike trunks and its general look

of vacancy. They sat on the trunks and looked forlornly at one another, and sighed without answering Fran, till she cried out: "For pity's sake, say *something!*"

"Does it seem like only a short school year, girls, since we first came to this place?" asked Ruth quietly.

"Why, it seems to me like we've *always* had the Bower!" answered Nathalie, relapsing into her old Southernisms in the emotion of the hour.

"Did you ever notice what remarkably flat things people say when they are just parting?" said Fran. "Here we are, all of us ready to weep, and yet we don't fall into the poetical vein that is said to be aroused by deep feeling; all we can say is, 'It seems an age since we came,' and 'Must we really go?' "

"But, truly," Ruth went on, "it is very funny when one thinks of how desperately homesick we were that night—do you remember?—when we consoled ourselves by talking about 'home?' And

now we hate so to leave 'this detestable place.' It's not that we're not anxious to go home, either! — especially Our Mutual Friend!"

"No," Nathalie said, and smiled. "And, Ruthie, we are better off, anyway, because there will be the two of us together. But Fran seems so far away."

"Well," said Mrs. Boffin, "my feelin's is strong and my affections is sincere, but I don't feel like sitting up all night over this, do you?"

And so this chapter must end, as so many scenes of our human life do end, in going to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WEDDING

The atmosphere
Breathes rest and comfort, and the many chambers
Seem full of welcomes.

—*Longfellow.*

IT was the first day of September when Nathalie was married. She had gone home so tired from the combined work and excitement of the last few weeks of the college year that her mother had insisted upon her having a long rest with her uncle's family on the New Jersey shore. Ruth had gone down there to join her and to go to Virginia for the wedding.

Fran, at the last minute, had been able to get a pass; so that the Boffins all met again at Sunnylawn—all but Bella Wilfer, who, as usual, "went without," with never a complaint against her lot, only a

happy letter of congratulation, and of looking forward to seeing the "John Rokesmiths" some time at Northampton.

There had been weeks of rainy weather, an unusual thing for the season; but everything seemed peculiarly fresh and delightful when the sun came out with a bright smile on the wedding morning.

They were married in the little church about two miles drive from the house, at eight o'clock in the morning, and then had a dainty breakfast on the piazzas. The ground that they had planned for was too wet, but when they sat on the piazzas looking off toward the river, Nathalie and Mrs. Page recalled the evening when Nathalie came home and they had that sweetest of all confidences together, sitting just as they were now, and they were glad to have this joyful consummation on the same spot. You see, they were very old-fashioned and sentimental—those two—in spite of Nathalie's "freshman year!"

Meanwhile the Chittenden clans gathered, as we saw them at the opening of this story, and decided who should be at "the house" (nobody remembered to call it *The Cedars*), and what each one should do toward the grand, united welcoming of this "darling child" into their homes and bosoms. Here and there from the three households came an old dressing-bureau, a gem of a writing-case, or an old-time portrait, to fill up some corner of the new rooms.

"Spick-and-span things never do look so homelike!" said Aunt Bonnie Ray, as she fastened an exquisitely carved rose-wood bric-à-brac shelf to a corner of the dining-room wall. "I'm just putting this up with pins, so it will look as if it belonged here; but they can move it to a dozen other corners when they get here. People never think alike about these things, and 'there's no disputing of tastes.'" She finished these remarks by putting her best china rose-jar, which she

had had ever since she could remember, on the little table in the open corner by the hall fireplace.

Another aunt had just arranged, in a leaded glass china-closet in the dining-room, a beautiful old set of dishes, decorated with landscapes of a dull magenta shade of red with gilt edges.

Then they stocked the pantry with everything they could think of—salt and pepper and such necessaries being produced by Aunt Bonnie, while all the eatables were put in brand-new tinware of every conceivable shape. As Will said, they would have no chance at all for "another" tin wedding.

The aunts stayed long enough to enjoy the "sight of those two pigeons" and of their first delight in the preparations, and then they left them in sole possession of the house and of the little maid, who seemed as fitted to her surroundings as if she had been made to order with the tins and the rugs.

"Here," said Nathalie, "we must put

this clock of mother's in the dining-room. I've grown up on that clock in the dining-room, and should never be able to eat without it."

"And I very much fear that we shall *need* a clock in the dining-room," said Will teasingly; "for how I'm ever to get up from breakfast and go to my office every morning with you sitting there and looking like the original Aurora—before the days of business—that I can't say."

"Oh, we shall get over all our foolish ways after a while!" said Nathalie, with quiet wisdom in her shining eyes; "and then I shall be saying, 'Breakfast will be ready soon, dear,' and you will say, 'Well, do make haste, for I'm in a hurry to get to the office this morning, and I really can't wait all day!' We may be fighting over the clock in a month or two, and you comparing it with your watch, and saying it's a little slow—it does lose time. But, Will, did you see the water-color painting the Boffins gave me? It must be here somewhere; it was

to be sent here—and, yes, it's on this table. Oh, how beautiful! You know the anemone is my favorite flower." And Nathalie's eyes filled up with tears as she read Ruth's inscription on the back of it:

TO OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

The young incautious days of headlong spring,
  Leaping from rugged winter's loosening grasp,
  Facing the strong insistent winds that rasp
Our human nerves, our human faces sting,
A brief, sweet promise of the May-time bring;
  The colors of the morning, and alas!
  The morning's evanescence. Strong winds pass
And o'er the ground the scattered petals fling.

And yet, the windflower's beauty did not die.
  Into our hearts it entered, with its peace
    And cheer and fragrance and kind Nature love.
So when young days, though swiftly passing, tie
  Our human lives, our friendship cannot cease.
    Its life from our lives never shall remove.

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